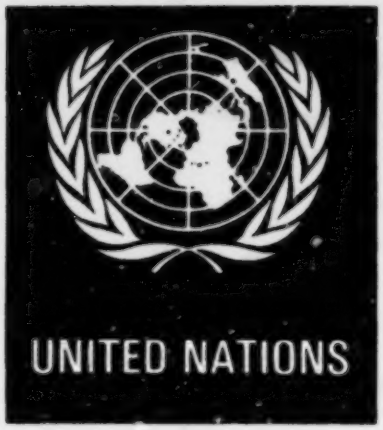

DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

SPECIAL BULLETIN ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

1998

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I. COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

On 30 November 1998, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed at United Nations Headquarters, New York, and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, as well as in several other cities, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

All States Members of the United Nations and specialized agencies and observers were invited to attend the solemn meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

At that meeting, statements were made by: Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; Mr. Didier Opertti (Uruguay), President of the General Assembly; Ms. Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations; and Mr. Peter Burleigh (United States), President of the Security Council for the month of November. The Permanent Observer of Palestine, Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, read out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority. Also, Mr. John de Saram (Sri Lanka) made a statement in his capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

In addition, the representative of Qatar, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, delivered a message on behalf of Mr. Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers at its twenty-fifth session. Mr. Khiphusizi J. Jele (South Africa) made a statement on behalf of Mr. Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa and Chairman of the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Mr. Michel Kafando (Burkina Faso) read out a message from Mr. Blaise Campaoré, President of Burkina Faso and Chairman of the Organization of African Unity. Mr. Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs of the League of Arab States, read out a message from Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. A statement was made by Mr. David Graybeal, on behalf of the International Network of NGOs on the Question of Palestine.

Closing statements were made by Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Messages to commemorate the occasion were received from 27 heads of State, 10 heads of Government, 1 Government, 7 foreign ministers, as well as the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Messages were also received from 10 non-governmental organizations.

In further commemoration of the International Day, a cultural exhibit entitled "Bethlehem 2000" was presented by the Committee, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, in the Public Lobby at United Nations Headquarters from 30 November to 6 December 1998. In addition, the Committee arranged the screening of films during the week beginning 30 November in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium and at the exhibit area.

At the United Nations Office at Geneva, a solemn meeting was held on 30 November. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, who opened the meeting by reading the statement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations Office at Geneva, Mr. Michael Bartolo, spoke on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Mrs. Absa Claude Diallo (Senegal), representative of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, made a statement. Further statements were made by H.E. Mr. Saad Alfarargi, representative of the League of Arab States; Mr. Jafar Olia, representative of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; Mr. Peter Goosen, representative of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries; H.E. Mr. Abderrahmane Bensid, representative of the Organization of African Unity; and Ms. Muna Kaldawi, representative of the International Coordinating Committee for Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine. Mr. Nabil Ramlawi, Permanent Observer of Palestine, read out the statement of Chairman Yasser Arafat.

At the United Nations Office at Vienna, a solemn meeting was also held on 30 November. H.E. Mr. Abdelaziz Chaabane (Tunisia) opened the meeting and spoke on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Mr. Nandasiri Jasentuliyana, Deputy to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna, delivered the message of the Secretary-General. Other speakers included H.E. Mr. Emil Staffelmayr, Deputy Secretary-General of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria; Mr. Samir Youssef Hezzah, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States; and H.E. Mr. Faisal Aweidah, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations Office at Vienna, who read out the statement of Chairman Yasser Arafat.

II. TEXTS OF STATEMENTS MADE AND MESSAGES DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, 1998

COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Statement by Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

[Original: French]

We are gathered here to celebrate, as we do each year, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This day commemorates the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, in which the Assembly decided to partition Palestine into two States, one Arab and the other Jewish, and to confer international status on the city of Jerusalem.

During the past year, while the Israelis celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their State, Palestinians everywhere observed a day of mourning in memory of the nabkah, the catastrophe which led to their dispossession and exile.

This anniversary was observed even as tensions mounted on the ground and the international community was deeply concerned by the prolonged stalemate in the peace process. At that time it became increasingly apparent that the Palestinian people could not remain dispossessed and deprived of its rights. Nor could the international community remain indifferent to the deterioration in the situation on the ground.

There has been a renewed expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people, which is struggling to obtain its rights, and a stepping up of efforts to move the peace negotiations forward. Today we are gratified to note that a number of important General Assembly resolutions, namely those on Palestine's participation in the work of the United Nations, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the Bethlehem 2000 Project, were adopted by an overwhelming majority.

The enhanced status accorded to Palestine at the current session and the fact that Chairman Arafat participated for the first time in the Assembly's general debate are significant milestones along the road to full recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people and, ultimately, full membership in the Organization.

Today's commemoration should give new impetus to our joint efforts to help the Palestinian people at this crucial time in its history.

Your presence here today shows that the United Nations is not only concerned by the fact that the question of Palestine is still unresolved after so many years, but is determined to redouble its efforts to achieve a harmonious, just and lasting peace based on international legitimacy.

The peace process has now reached a decisive phase. It is encouraging to note that the Wye River Memorandum has broken the stalemate in which the negotiations had languished for nine months, bringing the two parties closer to negotiations on the final status. We earnestly hope that this new

agreement as well as the preceding ones will be implemented fully so as to restore hope in the peace process and mutual trust, which are indispensable to the establishment of a lasting peace.

We are nevertheless concerned at the stepping up of settlement construction and other unilateral acts aimed at securing land prior to the start of negotiations on the final status. The settlements symbolize an ongoing political occupation which is contrary to the spirit and the letter of the peace process and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Expansion of the settlements, far from reinforcing Israel's security, as the Israeli Government maintains, is a constant source of friction, instability and insecurity that can only undermine efforts at reconciliation.

Since 1967, the international community has been unanimous in opposing the building of settlements and all other measures taken by the occupying Power to alter the legal status, physical characteristics and demographic composition of the occupied territory, including Jerusalem. The Security Council has adopted countless resolutions qualifying these measures as violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, declaring them to be null and void. The General Assembly and other United Nations organizations and intergovernmental bodies have taken similar positions. The settlements will continue to be considered illegal regardless of their number or the number of settlers living in the occupied territory.

As the transitional period provided for in the 1993 Declaration of Principles draws to a close, the Palestinian people will require the international community's solidarity more than ever. While the parties are the only ones who can make peace, the international community's active involvement in upholding international legitimacy, its political and economic support and its efforts to promote regional cooperation will be of crucial importance for the success of the negotiations.

This year as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and stand on the threshold of a new millennium, these events should inspire us to increase our efforts to ensure that the rights of peoples are respected and that peace and justice reign throughout the world, particularly in this land, sacred to three great religions, which has known too much suffering and bloodshed.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has pledged to do everything in its power in the coming year, working together with other Member States and various sectors of the international community, to achieve this noble objective. I call upon all those here today to do likewise in the interest of peace.

Ms. Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

[Original: English]

First of all, let me say how pleased I am to participate for the first time in this annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People organized by the Committee in accordance with the mandate given by the General Assembly.

On this day 51 years ago, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution which, if implemented, would have created an Arab and a Jewish State in Palestine, living side by side in peaceful coexistence.

Year after year, this anniversary provides the international community with an opportunity – and an obligation – to refocus its attention on the distressing fact that after more than half a century, the issue of Palestine remains unresolved. It is an occasion for us to recommit ourselves to the objective of achieving

a just and lasting settlement in the Middle East, in the interest of Israelis and Palestinians but also as part of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East – so essential to peace and security in general.

Since taking office, the Secretary-General has made every effort to support the peace process in the Middle East – and to mobilize the resources of the United Nations family to help create an economic and social environment favourable to peace.

In the course of his visit to the region earlier this year, the Secretary-General witnessed the hardship and deprivation caused by decades of conflict, as well as of the yearning on all sides for a peaceful future. He took that opportunity to appeal to the leaders of all parties to continue building on the achievements of the peace process, to make every effort to resume the negotiations in earnest, and to take the difficult decisions needed to move towards reconciliation and cooperation.

The recent signing of the Wye River Memorandum by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization is an encouraging development. It came after many months of uncertainty and concern over the future of the peace process, fuelled by growing mistrust between the parties and rising tensions in the region.

The implementation of the agreement has started. The United Nations earnestly hopes that it will be carried out in all its aspects and will pave the way for the resumption of negotiations on all tracks.

Regrettably, incidents of violence by elements opposed to the peace process have continued to cost lives and mar progress. The United Nations has repeatedly condemned such acts. At the same time, we have appealed to the parties not to be swayed by such incidents but instead, to redouble their efforts in pursuit of a lasting solution to the conflict.

It is necessary for the parties to address not only the manifestations but also the causes of violence, to restore hope, mutual confidence and a spirit of partnership, and to work together for a future of peace, cooperation and good-neighbourliness.

More than 50 years after the resolution whose adoption we mark today, and as we near the end of the process originally envisaged under the 1993 Declaration of Principles, positive advances along this road are needed urgently. It is also essential to create the political and economic conditions that will enable this hope to be realized in practice. A rapid improvement in living conditions in the Palestinian territories is an essential accompaniment to the peace negotiations.

In that regard, there has been serious concern at the steady decline of the Palestinian economy in recent years, largely due to the impact of security measures, the lack of free movement of persons and goods between the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinians' lack of control over their natural resources.

Real progress in the fields of employment, health, education, human rights and industrial and commercial development is urgently needed to strengthen support for the peace process. Despite the ongoing efforts of the United Nations, in particular those of UNRWA, the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, UNDP and other programmes and agencies present on the ground, much still needs to be done to alleviate existing conditions and to lay a solid foundation for future development.

We firmly believe that the international community can and should go further. In particular, the serious financial situation faced by UNRWA requires intensified efforts by all concerned to ensure that the quality and level of services for Palestine refugees can be maintained as an essential contribution to stability in the area.

In conclusion, I should like to extend my thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts in support of the Palestinian people and for a future of peace in the Middle East.

And I should like to renew the pledge that the United Nations family will continue to provide all possible expertise and assistance in humanitarian relief and in the fields of economic and social development in order to contribute towards creating the necessary conditions for peace.

Mr. Didier Opertti (Uruguay), President of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly of the United Nations

[Original: English]

At the outset, I would like to say that I am honoured to take part in this commemorative meeting in my capacity as President of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. In December 1977, the General Assembly, in its resolution 32/40 B, called for the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Traditionally on this day, the international community renews its pledge to the Palestinian people to continue to support its legitimate aspirations and demands on the basis of the principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions.

Since the early days of the United Nations, the question of Palestine has remained a matter of major preoccupation and concern to its Members. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), partitioning Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with an economic union between them and a special international regime for the city of Jerusalem. Half a century later, this remains the oldest unresolved issue on our Organization's agenda.

Some five years ago, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations came to a dramatic turning point, when leaders of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed an historic document - the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, which ushered in a new stage in their relations. The Declaration of Principles was welcomed by the international community as a sign of hope and an indication of political courage, far-sightedness and genuine desire to achieve peace and stability in the region. Since then, the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations have seen many ups and downs, breakthroughs and frustrations.

We were gratified that, following a protracted and uneasy stalemate, the parties have at last succeeded in recapturing the momentum of peace and putting the process back on track. The signing of the Wye River Memorandum, its subsequent ratification and gradual implementation, as well as the beginning of the permanent status talks, show that both parties are committed to proceed along the road to peace in accordance with the existing agreements.

Nevertheless, we are aware of how long and difficult this process will be and how tense the situation on the ground remains. In this respect, it is absolutely essential for the agreements to be scrupulously respected and for the parties to refrain from engaging in unilateral acts in pursuit of advantage on the ground. In particular, the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session has demonstrated anew its serious concern at ongoing settlement construction, calling for a conference of contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to consider measures to ensure respect for its provisions. We are grateful to the Swiss Government for its efforts in this regard.

The General Assembly has continued to reiterate the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects with fairness and justice. It is incumbent on all of us - Members of this Organization - to see to it that this objective is brought to fruition. For the peace process to succeed, it should continue to be based on respect for the universally recognized principles of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions, notably Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination.

Helping the Palestinian people to establish solid foundations for peace through the mobilization of international assistance for economic and social development is another essential task of the international community. The United Nations family of organizations, in cooperation with donor countries and the international community as a whole, must intensify their efforts in this regard so as to enable the Palestinian people, who have suffered for so long, to begin enjoying the fruits of peace.

I would like to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its untiring efforts in support of the Palestinian people and in implementation of the important mandate given to it by the General Assembly. I would also like to recall the important initiative of the Committee to introduce a new item in the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly. The consideration of the item, entitled "Bethlehem 2000", the involvement of the United Nations in this worldwide and truly historic celebration, and the adoption, without a vote, of a resolution marking this millennial event became a manifestation of the international community's conviction that peace, justice and harmony will prevail in this troubled region.

Under your dedicated leadership, Mr. Chairman, the Committee has done much to bring the question of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and, more broadly, the question of Palestine, into sharp international focus. I have been following with interest the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and I know how keen it is to make a concrete contribution to international endeavours in support of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. I would like to wish you every success in your mission.

Mr. Peter Burleigh (United States), President of the Security Council for the month of November 1998

[Original: English]

At the outset, allow me to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the invitation extended to me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November, to participate in this special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

As President of the Security Council, it gives me much pleasure to join in this annual event in which the international community voices its solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people, as well as its enduring commitments to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with United Nations resolutions. The Council fully recognizes that a solution to this problem is a key element in the efforts to achieve a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict within the framework of the Oslo accords.

For many years the Security Council has been closely associated with the efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Thanks to the efforts of the parties and of the co-

I extend my profuse thanks to all the fraternal Arab States and peoples, and to all other friendly peoples, and in particular to the Arab leaders, the States of the European Union, Norway, the Russian Federation, China, Japan, the Islamic States and the Non-Aligned States, for their continuing solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle to reclaim and exercise these inalienable rights in fulfilment of the Charter and relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the principles of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and noble humanitarian values and principles.

Your commemoration of this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes on this year, at this particular moment, a special meaning and a far-reaching importance, particularly since our people have just this very month celebrated an anniversary of historic importance to them, namely the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine, which was promulgated by the Palestine National Council on 15 November 1988. At that time, it received the sanction and recognition of fraternal and friendly States and constituted a turning point in the history of our people's struggle because it was the expression of their free will, of their momentous sacrifices throughout more than eight decades, and of their strong and deep-rooted attachment to freedom and independence in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy which have guaranteed their right to establish their own independent State like all other peoples on earth.

The support of the majority of States Members of the United Nations for the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine was greatly valued and appreciated by our people, and it was, and remains, a major validation of our just struggle. Today, we are in greater need than ever of the continuation and strengthening of such worldwide solidarity on the part of all our brethren and friends in order to assist the Palestinian people to make a reality of the Declaration of Independence and to implement it on the blessed soil of Palestine during the coming year, after the end of the five-year interim period specified in the Declaration of Principles that was signed in Washington on 13 September 1993.

We hope that the independent State of Palestine on Palestinian soil will be declared and made a tangible reality in an atmosphere of understanding, cooperation, trust and mutual respect for all the agreements concluded with the Israeli side. The most recent of these was the Wye River Memorandum on the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Palestinian territories in accordance with the timetable determined in compliance with the Oslo Accords, signed at the White House in Washington under the auspices of President Clinton, and with his assistance, and in Cairo under the auspices of President Hosni Mubarak, and with his support.

As you are aware, as a result of concentrated efforts and tough and exhausting negotiations, and after a break in the peace process that had lasted for more than 18 months, the Wye River Memorandum was signed in Washington on 23 October 1998, sponsored by the United States and President Clinton. The Memorandum brought renewed hope to the peoples of the region, and to the Palestinian people in particular, that the peace process would be revived and put back on course, and would continue to make progress on all tracks, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, towards bringing a comprehensive and just peace to the Middle East. We trust that the Government of Israel will continue to implement the provisions of the Memorandum precisely, in good faith, and with the minimum of delay. We are especially interested in the application of the provisions to the Palestinian political and security prisoners, as this is a sensitive issue of great concern to our people.

While expressing our satisfaction that the Israeli Government has begun implementation of the first stage of the Memorandum, this being a step in the right direction, we urge upon that Government the necessity of halting forthwith all unilateral measures. Foremost among such measures are the expropriation of Palestinian land and the settlement activities in occupied Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which are intended to Judaize that city. Israeli settlements in other Palestinian areas also continue to be built and expanded, regardless of the fact that they are illegal and constitute a flagrant violation of the resolutions

of international legitimacy, international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as of the agreements signed by the Palestinian and Israeli parties.

Such unilateral measures and settlement activities are nothing more than a desperate attempt to impose the status quo. They constitute a time bomb placed in the path of the peace process, and dissipate and destroy all the hopes and endeavours that have been invested in the peace process. The Israeli Government's persistence in this illegal settlement drive may be considered an attempt on its part unilaterally to define and draw up a map of the final status.

Settlement activities constitute a threat and are completely incompatible with peace. We therefore hope that friendly international endeavours to oblige the Israeli Government to honour its obligations pursuant to the Memorandum it has signed will continue, in order that the peace process may proceed and negotiations on the final status may be resumed in an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding and respect. Only then can just and acceptable solutions be found to the crucial issues under discussion, upon the resolution of which hangs the future of the peace process in the whole region.

The Palestinian people is determined to declare independence, and is sustained in that resolution and commitment by your support for and solidarity with it, and by the justice and legitimacy of its right to make such a declaration. The freedom and independence that have been denied for so long are the dream of every Palestinian. We greatly appreciate the many resolutions adopted by the United Nations on all aspects of the question of Palestine. These include the decision to raise the level of Palestinian representation, the resolution on Bethlehem 2000 and the resolution on settlement of the issue of Palestine by peaceful means.

God willing, the young Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, will be positive, prosperous, stable and flourishing, and will contribute as an equal partner to the consolidation of a just, equitable and comprehensive peace, made between courageous parties, which will strengthen cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding and promote the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the region. We trust that all friends and all those who believe in such a peace will recognize and support this State, thereby acknowledging right and justice and upholding international legitimacy and its resolutions and humanitarian values and principles.

Mr. John de Saram (Sri Lanka), Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

[Original: English]

I have the honour, today, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to speak on behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The Special Committee, established by the General Assembly in 1968, has reported each year to the General Assembly on the conditions affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories: Gaza, the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Arab Golan.

This year, the Special Committee submitted to the General Assembly its thirtieth report: a reminder, it could be said, that the occupied territories have been under occupation for 30 years.

The Special Committee sought in its report to convey to the General Assembly its views as to the conditions under which the people in the occupied territories live. They are conditions, the Special Committee found, that do not, in a number of respects, accord with contemporary international norms as to human rights nor with requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which also applies to the occupied territories.

The overriding impression that has formed in the minds of the three members of the Special Committee (Ambassador Madame Absa Claude Diallo, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations in Geneva; Ambassador Abdul-Majid Mohamed, formerly Ambassador of Malaysia to the United States; and I, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York) is a troubling one.

The Israeli authorities have put in place a comprehensive and elaborate system of laws and regulations and administrative measures that are designed to meet the policy objectives of the Israeli Government and to enhance control over the occupied territories and over the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The laws and regulations and administrative measures are so framed that they vest in officials a considerable degree of authority and latitude. They affect important aspects of the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. A rigorous implementation of the laws and regulations and administrative measures, particularly during periods of crises, creates among the Palestinian people of the occupied territories a sense of fear, a sense of despondency, a sense of hopelessness. There exists an all-encompassing sense of great tension in the occupied territories, particularly during periods of crisis. And during periods of violence the exercise of such control makes the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories even more unbearable.

Bitterness at their treatment by the authorities, their sense of dispossession, their sense of hopelessness and despair, caused to a large extent, it seems to the Special Committee, by a lack of progress in the peace process and a lack of tangible benefits for the Palestinian people of the occupied territories, makes the situation in the occupied territories one of the greatest urgency.

The Special Committee regrets that conditions of life in the occupied territories have not improved as hoped for. The Special Committee in its report to the General Assembly made specific recommendations to the General Assembly that concrete steps should be taken to ameliorate the conditions under which the Palestinian people of the occupied territories live.

Our recommendations were as follows:

That the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in communication with the Secretary-General, takes such measures as are appropriate to engage in consultation with the appropriate Israeli authorities with respect to the following:

(a) Permitting long-separated families in the occupied Palestinian territories to meet freely and often;

(b) The entire process of detention, including reasons for detention, renewal of periods of detention and treatment of detainees;

(c) The use of physical force and torture prohibited by the 1984 United Nations Convention against Torture during interrogations; detention and imprisonment;

(d) The effect of the occupation, including settlements, closures and restriction on movement, on the children of the occupied territories;

(e) Facilitating access to educational centres;

(f) Ameliorating the conditions under which Palestinians in Gaza travel from Gaza into Israel through the Erez border crossing.

Finally, the Special Committee considers it to be of great importance that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in consultation with the Secretary-General, and, above all, in the light of the respect to be always accorded the dignity of the human person, establish a system of continuous communication with Israeli authorities with a view to relieving the very difficult circumstances in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live, and which gives rise to violence which the Special Committee deplores.

The Special Committee is encouraged by the resumption of the Peace Process and the positive steps that are being taken pursuant thereto which it hopes will lead to the establishment of a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace, long awaited by all the peoples of the region.

Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, representing Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers at its twenty-fifth session

[Original: English]

It gives me great pleasure, as Chairman of the twenty-fifth conference of the Foreign Ministers of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, to participate in this meeting with this statement on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This day is but a sincere expression of the will of the international community to uphold the Palestinian cause and assist and support the Palestinian people to attain their national inalienable rights, including their right to return to their homeland, to self-determination, and to the enjoyment of their independent State on their national soil.

The people of the world, in their entirety, have come to realize all the facts. They know that the stumbling blocks encountered in the peace process threaten to undermine the whole process and squander the achievements attained so far. They realize that this is only the inevitable result of the intransigence of the Israeli Government and its failure to honour its obligation and commitments, thus proving the lack of credibility of Israel's adherence to the basis on which the peace process has been founded since its inception in Madrid, especially the principle of land for peace and the relevant United Nations resolutions, foremost among which are Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Gravely concerned at the fact that Israel has continued its settlement, expansionist policies in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the occupied Palestinian territories, the OIC affirms its categorical rejection of these policies, which are a violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy. It also emphasizes its rejection of all illegitimate Israeli actions aimed at changing the legal status, the geographical character and the demographic composition of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and calls on the international community to strive to safeguard and protect the holy places therein.

The OIC supports the universally unanimous position that the best means to settle the Palestinian questions lies in the implementation of the bilateral agreements concluded between the Palestinian and

Israeli sides and the relevant resolutions of he United Nations. It calls once again on the international community on this day to support the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority so that they can establish their own homeland and so that the Palestinians, who have suffered for so long, can enjoy prosperity and stability. It also calls upon the international community to pressure Israel to abide by and implement the resolutions of international legitimacy.

In conclusion, I would like to express our great appreciation to the United Nations for its outstanding role in supporting the cause of the Palestinian people and rendering assistance to them. I would also like to extend thanks and appreciation to all those participating in observing this occasion, to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, its Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, and the members of the Bureau for their sincere, tireless efforts. I wish the Committee every success in its endeavours to enable the Palestinian people to realize their legitimate rights in full and their hopes to establish their own independent State on their national soil. This would doubtless achieve peace and security, not only in the Middle East but also in the whole world.

May God's peace, mercy and blessings be upon you.

Mr. Khiphusizi J. Jele, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, representing Mr. Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa and Chairman of the Coordinating Bureau of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries

[Original: English]

On behalf of the people of South Africa, the Southern African Development Community, the Non-Aligned Movement and in my own name, I extend greetings to the Palestinian people and to President Yasser Arafat on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We extend our friendship and solidarity to all the Palestinian people, wherever they may be. More than 50 years after the United Nations voted to accord the Palestinian people a national homeland, this dream remains unfulfilled. We express our support for the continuing efforts of the Palestinian people, under the leadership of President Yasser Arafat, to achieve their inalienable national rights, including the right to self-determination and national independence.

We remain convinced that the only means of ending conflict and bringing peace and security to Palestine, Israel and the region is through negotiations and the faithful implementation of agreements reached so far. For this reason, we are deeply happy to learn of the results of the marathon summit between President Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu, under the auspices of United States President Clinton. We also salute His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan for the valuable contribution that he made under extremely difficult circumstances. We congratulate President Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu on the signing of the Wye River Memorandum and wish them well in their quest for an equitable and lasting peace. May this agreement give new hope and courage to all in the region and may it indeed revitalize the Middle East peace process which has been deadlocked for far too long. All the participants deserve our heartfelt congratulations for their courage, vision and their spirit of commitment to making peace.

We trust that the implementation of this agreement, and more urgently, the release of all Palestinian political prisoners, will eliminate some of the obstacles and rebuild trust, without which no efforts at achieving a lasting peace can succeed.

South Africans understand the suffering of the Palestinian people. Palestinians continue to suffer humiliation and economic hardship. Those who live in exile as refugees have for long been sustained by their hope for an end to the conflict and the dawning of a better future. The legitimate expectations born at the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 and sustained through an initial period of progress were subsequently dashed by earlier unilateral actions on the part of the Israeli Government. We commend the Palestinian people for their commitment to peaceful negotiations and, in the light of the new start made at Wye River Plantation, urge all parties to recommit themselves to a negotiated settlement and to refrain from acts of violence. We also call upon the Israeli Government to comply with its obligations to withdraw from Palestinian territory timeously, so that further progress can be made.

To the international community we address the appeal to remain faithful to the goal of achieving a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East. The people of Palestine and the whole region need our support for their efforts to put an end to this conflict which has plagued the world for so long. The achievement of a just and comprehensive peace will not only have an effect on the lives of the people of that region, it will reverberate around the globe and promote the cause of international peace and security in a fundamental way. It is accordingly in the interests of all members of the international community to continue to support peacemaking in the Middle East. It has to succeed and each of us carries a responsibility for the success of the peace process in the Middle East which five years ago showed so much promise.

The Non-Aligned Movement has reaffirmed its traditional and long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine and the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In this vein and on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Southern African Development Community and the Government of South Africa, I reiterate on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People our solidarity with and support for the struggle of the Palestinians to live in dignity and peace and, at last, to achieve security in a sovereign country of their own.

Mr. Michel Kafando, Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso to the United Nations, representing Mr. Blaise Campaoré, President of Burkina Faso and Chairman of the Organization of African Unity

[Original: French]

Observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People affords me with the pleasant opportunity of delivering, in my capacity as President of Burkina Faso and current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), this message by which I would convey to you the sympathy of all Africa with the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people and the ongoing efforts of that people to achieve self-determination.

Instituted by General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, this Day is intended to give the entire world an opportunity to show its support for the Palestinian people.

Once the cold war and decolonization ended, mankind was justified in hoping to live in a world that cherished peace, justice and tolerance, and over the past decade the international community has mobilized itself to achieve these objectives.

In the Middle East, the international community has spared no effort to reach a definitive settlement of the question of Palestine, which was first posed in 1947, following the creation of the State of Israel.

Africa has always taken part in these efforts by the international community. From Madrid in 1991 to the Oslo Accords in 1993, the Organization of African Unity, faithful to the spirit of its founding fathers, has unconditionally supported the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and the exercise of its inalienable rights to establish a sovereign State.

Africa therefore rejoices to see that, after a stalemate of several months, the recent Wye Plantation agreements, signed on 23 October 1998, hold out new prospects for a peace process in the Middle East that will henceforth be irreversible.

However, it remains imperative for the two parties to demonstrate wisdom and good will and to renew their efforts to implement these agreements effectively.

We appeal to the international community and to the United Nations to give unyielding support to initiatives aimed at creating the minimum political, economic and social conditions needed for reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. These include:

- Application of the fundamental principles of international law and the agreements concluded thus far as well as strict compliance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council on the Palestinian question;

- Promotion of economic and social development, especially in Gaza and the West Bank, where the situation gives cause for concern and where problems related to health, education and employment are acute.

Notwithstanding the magnitude of the tasks to be accomplished on the road to peace, Africa remains confident and fervently hopes that the good will and the readiness of the leading players will bring the negotiations in progress to a successful conclusion.

In reiterating its faith in the ability of the United Nations, the ideal framework for settling the question of Palestine in a satisfactory manner while respecting legitimacy, Africa reaffirms on this day of commemoration its solidarity and its support for the struggle and the emancipation of the Palestinian people.

It expresses its hope for the establishment of a just and lasting peace, which is a condition that should enable the valiant Palestinian people, under the direction of the PLO, to achieve its principal objectives.

Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, delivered by Mr. Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs of the League of Arab States

[Original: Arabic]

I am pleased to address you today on behalf of the Secretariat of the League of Arab States and to convey to the Committee and the States and organizations represented here greetings from Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who expresses his appreciation of

the efforts made with regard to the question of Palestine and other just causes throughout the world. It is a great honour for me to participate in this United Nations meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We cherish this occasion as a symbol of the commitment of the international community to support the Palestinian people in the exercise of its national, established and legitimate rights.

This year, our commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has special significance because it coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By means of that instrument, the world made a commitment to preserve human dignity and to work to bring about justice and equality between all peoples. At this time attention is also focused on the Middle East and it is expected that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace will be established, ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and restoring to the Palestinian people its established and legitimate rights. You have worked unceasingly for these rights and in order that the Palestinian people might return to its land and exercise its right to self-determination by establishing an independent State on an equal footing with the other peoples of the world.

The United Nations, with its noble purposes and aims, has always striven to ensure that the question of Palestine remains a live issue that receives its full due of discussion and follow-up until such time as right prevails, and the attention of the effective powers in the international system has been drawn to the wrongs endured by the Palestinian people since Israel sabotaged General Assembly resolutions 181 (II), providing for the establishment of a Palestinian State; and 194 (III), ruling on the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to the homes from which they were expelled. United Nations cooperation with the League of Arab States and its members and all peace-loving States has played a part in placing the question of Palestine in its current position on the political stage and in rapid progress being made along the path to peace in the Middle East.

The United Nations affirmed its commitment to this constructive role in October 1998 when the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/8, in which it commended the continued efforts of the League of Arab States to promote multilateral cooperation among Arab States, and requested the United Nations system to continue to lend its support. It also requested the Secretariat of the United Nations and the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States to intensify further their cooperation with a view to the realization of the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, the strengthening of international peace and security, economic and social development, disarmament, decolonization, self-determination and the eradication of all forms of racism and racial discrimination. In that resolution, the General Assembly highlighted the importance of execution and implementation in these matters, calling upon the specialized agencies and other organizations and programmes of the United Nations system to maintain and increase contacts and improve the mechanism of consultation with the organizations of the League of Arab States in order to associate with them in the execution and implementation of development projects in the Arab region.

While expressing its thanks and appreciation to the United Nations, the League of Arab States reaffirms that it is ready and willing to cooperate with the United Nations system in all fields with a view to the realization of the purposes and principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. It is well known that the activities of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the capable and efficient chairmanship of Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, the Permanent Representative of Senegal, represent the outstanding medium through which the United Nations monitors the question of Palestine. The worthy Committee has had contacts and held consultations with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States with respect to a number of activities and programmes. Here, permit me, on behalf of Mr. Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, to express thanks and appreciation to Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ambassador Ka, Chairman of the Committee, and all the esteemed members of the Committee for all they

do for Palestine, and to reiterate the readiness of the League of Arab States to deepen and develop cooperation with the United Nations for the sake of world peace.

One of the important achievements we are celebrating today is the adoption on 7 July 1998 of General Assembly resolution 52/250, which confers upon Palestine additional rights and privileges and raises the level of its participation in the work of the United Nations. The presence of President Yasser Arafat at the opening ceremonies of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly has made available new opportunities for mutual cooperation and for us together to take further steps towards Palestine - at the appropriate time - becoming a full Member of the United Nations on an equal footing with other Member States, and in the same manner as Palestine enjoys full membership in the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and the Group of 77 and China. Among the positive indicators we should note is the fact that, in its resolution on the increase in the participation of Palestine, the General Assembly recalled its resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 concerning the partition of Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State, and its resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988 which acknowledged the proclamation of the State of Palestine by the Palestine National Council on 15 November 1988.

In my message to you last year, I mentioned that the Arab side was waiting for the results of moves and contacts undertaken by the United States of America and the efforts of the European Union and the Russian Federation to end the deadlock in the Middle East peace process caused by Israeli policy and the control exerted by extremists over political decision-making in Israel, which threatens to destroy the peace process, plunge the region into a state of no war and no peace and create a climate conducive to individual and collective violence. It was my duty, on behalf of the Arabs, to deliver this clear message to both the international community and Israeli society, so that all may work with the utmost seriousness and wisdom to avoid such a situation.

As I stand before you today there is once again hope that the signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998 will revitalize the peace process that has, because of the intransigence of Israeli policies, been stagnant for more than 18 months. The Arabs have maintained their commitment to peace as a strategic option while monitoring every resolution for international moves to rescue the peace process, such as the contacts made by Mr. Miguel Moratinos, the European Union special envoy to the Middle East, the Egyptian-French initiative that must remain on the agenda, and the special role of the United States as a mediator and the principal sponsor of the peace process.

In addition to the international move to which I have referred, there has been a parallel Arab move aimed at supporting the Palestinian negotiator. Since the latest Arab Summit, President Arafat has attended the biannual opening sessions of the Council of the League of Arab States, giving Arab Ministers for Foreign Affairs the opportunity to learn of the latest developments in the situation and to hold in-depth discussions with all delegations, including the Palestinian delegation led by His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine. The League of Arab States and its Secretary-General, Mr. Esmat Abdel Meguid, are highly appreciative of President Arafat's interest in these consultations and the coordination with fellow Arabs under circumstances of the greatest complexity, and considers this a guarantee that a unified Arab position will be formulated with respect to the peace process at all stages.

The communiqué issued by the one hundred and eighth session of the Council of the League of Arab States, held under the chairmanship of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, summarized this position with regard to the peace process in guidelines that continue to represent the Arab stance. Allow me if you will to quote the following extracts from the communiqué:

"- Request the resumption of negotiations on the three negotiating tracks:

First: With respect to the Syrian Arab Republic, from the point at which negotiations were halted, and with a commitment to what had been agreed on this track;

Second: With regard to Lebanon, the basis should be implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978);

Third: With respect to the Palestinians, the contractual undertakings must be implemented, including the obligations of the interim phase, in parallel with the beginning of negotiations on the final status; the Palestinian people must exercise its right to self-determination and to establish an independent State.

- The Arabs welcomed the position of the United States of America, which was made clear during the visit by Mrs. Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State of the United States, to the region. They decided to cooperate with the United States policy she expounded in her speech to the National Press Club in Washington on 6 August 1997, and which she further clarified during her visits to and contacts with regional States by affirming the authority of Madrid and, in particular, the principle of land for peace, and the importance of implementing relevant Security Council resolutions, achieving the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people and abiding by the commitment to take no unilateral measures that could affect the final status negotiations. She also affirmed the need to build on this positive United States position and request Israel to respond with an equivalent position.

- The European role in support of the peace process was welcomed, and the importance of making this role effective as part of international efforts to this end was stressed.

- A commitment was made to the resolutions of international legitimacy within the framework of the United Nations and to work for their implementation."

Following the universal perception that the peace process was beginning to collapse, international and Arab moves bore fruit in the form of the United States initiative and the convening of the Wye River negotiations. The world followed these negotiations for 10 days, and observers witnessed the wisdom and spirit of responsibility with which President Arafat led the Palestinian delegation in the face of the intransigence, extortion and lack of political maturity that characterized the Israeli attitude at the negotiations.

The world also witnessed the special and distinguished efforts made by Mr. Bill Clinton, the President of the United States, Mrs. Albright, Secretary of State, and the whole United States Administration in order to end a long period of stagnation by reaching a memorandum on implementation of the second stage of interim self-government.

As you are aware, the Wye River Memorandum represents a mechanism for the implementation of previous commitments made in the Oslo Agreement and the Agreement on Hebron. These commitments concerned the redeployment of Israeli forces in parts of the West Bank and the total or partial handing over of those areas to the Palestinian National Authority, security measures in the framework of the law and respect for human rights in order to raise awareness and create a suitable psychological climate for the advancement of the peace process, protect it from the effects of violence and improve the living and economic conditions of the Palestinian people living under Israeli control, in addition to the beginning of final status negotiations.

In this context, redeployment operations have a special significance, since land is the crucial point of the struggle in Palestine. The essence of the peace process is the return of occupied Arab territory to its legitimate owners. The return of even an inch of occupied Arab land therefore represents an achievement and a step towards its return in full, in accordance with the principle of land for peace. The statements occasionally made by some Israelis to the effect that there should be peace for security are meaningless, since peace is security and security is for all. With regard to the land, the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principles informing the peace process in Madrid agree that it belongs to the Arabs and has been forcibly occupied by Israel; its return is therefore fundamental to peace.

With respect to security measures, it must be stressed that if the peace process is in need of protection from the threats posed by violence and incitement, the Palestinian side does not bear sole responsibility for that. There are still many active forces in Israeli society that represent settler groups and their supporters among the politicians which constitute the main threat to the peace process because of the arms in their possession, the opportunities and legal protection they enjoy, and because of the prevalence of the ideology of expansion and the complete rejection of Arab and Palestinian rights.

Mr. Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, has summarized the League's position on the Wye River Memorandum: signed as a consequence of United States efforts and with the positive participation of Jordanian and Egyptian diplomacy, the Memorandum may be considered an important step that must be honestly and faithfully implemented by the Israeli Government. We must exploit the momentum created by the Memorandum to settle the final status issues by means of Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab lands and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Negotiations on the Syrian track must be resumed at the point at which they were broken off, there must be complete withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Arab Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and immediate implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) concerning unconditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa.

The Syrian and Lebanese position played a large part in confounding Israeli arrogance. It is a position that is mirrored by Arab public opinion, and I think it has been noted even in the United States. In mid-November 1997, Martin Indyk, United States Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, announced that President Clinton had recently informed President Hafez Al-Assad of his personal commitment to work towards reviving negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

The time has come for the authorities in the United States to make every effort to revive the negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks which the League of Arab States believes will uphold the peace process and guarantee security and stability in the region. The time has also come for the United States to respond without delay, while it is attempting to consolidate its interests in the region, to the feelings of the Arab street, which wants to see the sanctions imposed on the peoples of Iraq and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya lifted. It also wants those peoples to be allowed to manage their affairs as they wish and as they choose, and wants the Governments of both countries to be permitted to pursue the path of internal development for their citizens, resume their roles in the service of the question of Palestine and take part, when possible, in building peace and security in the region and in the world.

The League of Arab States is intent on the achievement of this goal, and is profoundly disturbed by the continuation of the current situation. It has undertaken discussions on the best way to contribute, with the interested parties in the world, to the development of an appropriate mechanism for the raising of sanctions imposed on Arab peoples and ending the reasons for such sanctions and their manifestations. Such a mechanism could include the formulation of an international agreement to outlaw the use of economic sanctions against peoples for any reason whatsoever.

While the Arabs and the world are working to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East in accordance with the noble purposes laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, there are still some voices in Israel calling for increased settlement and for the provisions of the Wye River Memorandum to be breached even before the ink on it has dried. In this context, the letter dated 30 October 1998 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations concerning the Wye River Memorandum was unfortunate in both timing and content. Mr. Sharon persists in using, even in that letter, the expression "Judea and Samaria" in order to refer to the Palestinian occupied West Bank, which indicates that his attachment to the illusion of a Greater Israel is greater than his commitment to achieving peace with the Arabs. Before his Government even begins to consider implementation of any of the articles of the Memorandum, Mr. Sharon is demanding that the United Nations should reconsider the resolutions of international legitimacy concerning the question of Palestine and relegate them to the legacy of the past, just as if the peace process had already achieved its goals.

The policy of underhand dealings pursued by the present Israeli Government and the contradictory signals given by some of its representatives reopen old wounds and give rise, regrettably, to misgivings and uncertainty as to Israel's intentions at this stage. The peace process has not warranted Arab acceptance of any softening of the formulation of international resolutions. It had been thought that if the resolution determining that zionism was a form of racism and racial discrimination were revoked, Israel would be encouraged to make progress towards peace. Today, therefore, the Arab side is committed to United Nations resolutions concerning the question of Palestine and the Middle East until a just, comprehensive and lasting solution can be reached and all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict are settled.

The League of Arab States considers that what is important now is to maintain international and, in particular, United States desire for Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian lands, and to begin final status negotiations on the Palestinian lands on the basis of international legitimacy, which acknowledged the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in the same instrument that represents the birth certificate of the State of Israel. These negotiations must conclude by enabling the Palestinian people to exercise sovereignty over its territory, in fulfilment of the declaration of the State of Palestine made by the Palestine National Council in 1988. Al-Quds Al-Sharif must be the capital of that State. Palestinian refugees must be allowed to exercise their right to return, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In conclusion, I hope that when we gather to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People next year, your efforts to bring peace will have borne fruit, Palestine will be a full Member of the United Nations and comprehensive and just peace will have been achieved in the Middle East.

Mr. David Graybeal, on behalf of the International Network of NGOs on the Question of Palestine

[Original: English]

I am honoured to have this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of Mr. Don Betz, Chairman of the International Coordinating Committee of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine, and on behalf of the global network of citizen-volunteers who work in the non-profit organizations concerned about human rights, justice and peace in the Middle East.

We are grateful for the encouragement of our activities as NGOs that we receive from the United Nations through the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and from the Division

on Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat. From the outset of the problems of peace and justice in the Middle East, we have applauded and endorsed the actions of the United Nations. We watched with respect the work that led to the original design in 1947 for the partition of Palestine into two sovereign States. We have endorsed the resolutions of the Security Council, especially those resolutions that have repeated the rule that territory may not be gained by force of arms.

But we have been dismayed by the fact that, while the Security Council's resolutions on Iraq have been enforced by severe sanctions and the use of force against Iraq, the refusal of Israel to conform to similar resolutions has been accepted without penalty. In The New York Times of Friday, 27 November, reporter Stephen Kinzer quotes a Ms. Khalidi in Amman as saying, "When the United Nations demands that Israel withdraw from occupied territories and Israel refuses, the world does nothing. But with Saddam, he must do what the United Nations says or he is bombed. It is so unfair."

The NGOs concerned about Palestine respect the United Nations, but we cannot accept in silence the unequal, unjust treatment it gives to these two States.

In the search for justice and peace, the NGOs support statehood for Palestine. In Geneva, on 28 August 1997, the International Coordinating Committee on the Question of Palestine agreed as follows: "The NGO participants declared individually and collectively that they recognize the State of Palestine with borders in conformity with those announced by the Palestine National Council in its Declaration of Independence of 1988. This involves full national sovereignty and self-determination for the entire Palestinian people inside their country and in exile to be exercised in the territory encompassing the West Bank and the Gaza Strip including East Jerusalem in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions. The NGO participants called upon all NGOs worldwide to join them in this solemn declaration and to petition the Governments of their respective nations to recognize the State of Palestine on this basis."

Mr. Chairman, the NGOs view the events of the coming year with both hope and anxiety. We will continue unabated our work in the fields of human rights and development. We ask you and your colleagues to press the General Assembly and the Security Council to exert the strong leadership the founders of this body envisioned for it, in the establishment of peace with justice in the Middle East.

III. MESSAGES RECEIVED ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

A. Messages from heads of State or Government

Prof. Burhân-ud-din Rabbâni, President of the Islamic State of Afghanistan

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I express the most sincere and unwavering support of the Islamic State of Afghanistan and that of the Afghan nation to the fraternal Palestinian people in their just struggle for attaining their inalienable rights to self-determination and statehood with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as their capital.

Mr. Liamine Zeroual, President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

[Original: Arabic]

On the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the support of the Government and people of Algeria for the unceasing endeavours of your Committee to establish the right of the Palestinian people to exercise all its legitimate and inalienable rights.

The resolution (3376 (XXX)) whereby the General Assembly decided, in 1975, to establish a Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was a clear indication of the international community's determination to assume its responsibilities in respect of the question of the Palestinian people and an affirmation of the continuing commitment of the United Nations, as the most important international platform for the collective will of the States of the world, to uphold the justice of that cause.

Algeria reaffirms once again its established position of principle on the issue as represented by its support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in complete freedom. It also renews its unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of that people to achieve the goal to which it aspires, especially at this critical stage in the history of its long battle.

Despite the appearance of glimmers of hope that the question of the Middle East in general and of Palestine in particular might be resolved, sparked by the beginning of the peace process at the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, peace remains a distant goal because of the many difficulties and obstacles created by the current Israeli Administration to a comprehensive, lasting and just resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on international legitimacy, the essence of which is the principle of land for peace.

The Palestinian people continues to look forward to the day when it will bask in the light of freedom and independence and begin a new stage in a life of dignity, after the years of subjugation and oppression it has endured under the yoke of occupation. That day can only come if its right to self-determination and to establish an independent State on the territory of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is acknowledged.

In order to bring this about, it remains the responsibility of the international community to increase its endeavours and to work in order to achieve justice for the Palestinian people and enable it to exercise its legitimate and inalienable rights as recognized in the General Assembly resolution pursuant to which this worthy Committee was established.

Mrs. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

[Original: English]

The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has always been of special importance to Bangladesh and to the freedom-loving peoples all over the world. Since the thirty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly this day has been observed faithfully to reaffirm solidarity with our Palestinian brethren and to remind the international community of its responsibilities in achieving a just and equitable solution of the Middle East problem. This year it is being observed in the wake of the Wye River Memorandum, which we welcome as a step forward in the Middle East peace process. It is our hope and expectation that it will be fully and sincerely implemented.

We in Bangladesh regard any progress in the Middle East peace process as an important contribution to international peace and security.

On this Day, the people of Bangladesh once again join me in reaffirming our support and total commitment to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right of self-determination, their right to national independence and sovereignty and their right to their homes and lands.

Mr. Sergei Ling, Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus

[Original: Russian]

Please accept my sincere congratulations on the occasion of commemorative events dedicated to the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

We highly value the significant efforts and achievements on the way towards a just and comprehensive resolution of the question of Palestine, related to the activities of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under your chairmanship.

The question of Palestine has always been in the focus of attention of the Belarus delegation at the sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. We welcomed with satisfaction the Palestinian-Israeli agreements reached on 23 October 1998.

Concern over difficulties recently faced by the Palestinian-Israeli dialogue is shared in Belarus and it is hoped that the international community by joint efforts would be able to overcome this tendency. We believe that there is no alternative to a just and comprehensive peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Said Musa, Prime Minister of Belize

[Original: English]

The Government and people of Belize express their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination and independence.

Belize welcomes the efforts being made towards the resolution of this issue, but expresses concern about the obstacles being put in the way of the Middle East peace process, which continue to hinder the achievement of a final settlement between Palestine and Israel.

Belize supports the national goal of the Palestinian people to assert their right to establish an independent State. We are mindful of the fact that less than two decades ago our people, with the help of the United Nations, achieved their independence, and it is our fervent hope that the Palestinian people will soon be allowed to enjoy their right to self-determination as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Today, as we observe another International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its diligent work and recognize the valuable role it plays in calling attention to this very important issue.

Mr. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the celebration of the 1998 International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to extend, on behalf of the people and Government of Brazil, my warmest greetings and best wishes of peace and harmony to the Palestinian people.

The Government of Brazil also wishes to congratulate the people of Palestine on the new status of the representation of Palestine to the United Nations. The decision by the General Assembly on this issue, which was supported by Brazil, corresponds to the political reality built in the Middle East since the Oslo Agreement.

I wish to take this opportunity to renew the commitment of the Brazilian people and Government to strengthen ties with Palestine. In this connection, the status of the representation of Palestine in Brasília was upgraded, even before the decision by the General Assembly.

Brazil has, over the years, firmly backed the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. In this regard, we note with satisfaction the recent positive developments in the peace process, and reaffirm our conviction that only constructive dialogue and respect for agreements could lead to the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah, Sultan dan Yang di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam

[Original: English]

On behalf of the Government and people of Brunei Darussalam, I am again pleased to add our voice to that of the world's community of nations in presenting our warmest congratulations to the people of Palestine on this International Day of Solidarity with them and in their just and legitimate struggle for peace and freedom.

In welcoming the recent progress in the peace process, Brunei Darussalam expresses its consistent support for a comprehensive settlement in accordance with the various United Nations resolutions which recognized the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to a homeland.

In this respect, I would like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of the leaders of all concerned parties which have led to the signing of the Wye Memorandum. I welcome their continued commitment to implement this Memorandum.

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend our best wishes to H.E. President Arafat and the people of the State of Palestine and assure them of our continued support.

Mr. Eduardo Frei Ruiz Tagle, President of the Republic of Chile

[Original: Spanish]

Eduardo Frei Ruiz Tagle, President of Chile, presents his compliments to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, and

joins in support of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to take place on 30 November 1998.

The Government of Chile takes this opportunity to express its appreciation for the work carried out by the United Nations for peace in the Middle East and for the support provided by the Organization to the Palestinian people, particularly through the granting of assistance designed to improve their economic and social conditions with a view to promoting a climate of reconciliation and compromise.

The President of Chile reaffirms his support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinians and the peace process in the Middle East, designed to ensure a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that guarantees the prosperity and well-being of that region. At the same time, he congratulates the parties on the success achieved in the talks held recently in order to give fresh impetus to a comprehensive agreement to that end.

Mr. Zhu Rongji, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

[Original: Chinese]

Upon the convocation of the conference marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to extend, on behalf of the Chinese Government and people, our warm congratulations to the conference.

Thanks to the powerful backing of the international community and the concerted efforts of all parties concerned since the launching of the Middle East peace process, important progress has been made in the Palestine-Israel peace talks and the Palestinian people have finally realised self-rule on their own territory. Recently, the unremitting efforts of all parties concerned have brought about the conclusion of an agreement between Palestine and Israel concerning the second-phase Israeli withdrawal of troops from the West Bank of the Jordan River and other issues. This represents a victory in the just cause of the Palestinian people and an important step towards the lofty goal of establishing an independent Palestinian State.

We are happy to see that the just cause of the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate national rights has won more and more extensive sympathy and support throughout the world. As trustworthy friends of the Palestinian people, the Chinese Government and people have unswervingly supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and rendered assistance to the best of their ability to the economic reconstruction in the Palestinian Autonomous Area. I hereby reiterate that China will, as always, work together with the other members of the international community to support the Middle East peace process and make continued efforts towards the comprehensive, just and durable settlement of the Middle East question and the Palestinian question.

Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like on behalf of the Government and the people of Cyprus to express our feelings of genuine friendship to the Palestinians and reaffirm at the same time our support of the efforts to establish peace, security and stability throughout the entire region of the Middle East.

Cyprus welcomes all the initiatives that actively promote the peace process, particularly the Agreement signed last month in Washington between the Palestinians and Israelis. On our part we pledge that we will continue to make our own contribution to the cause of peace, which, once achieved, will pave the way for closer cooperation and development in the region.

My country has been actively engaged in the multilateral track of the peace process. Its participation in a variety of programmes aims at promoting reconciliation and improving the standards of living of the peoples of the region, especially the Palestinians. The implementation by Cyprus of a Programme of Economic Assistance to the Palestinians is an irrefutable proof of our commitment to the process and the ultimate prevalence of peace, security and justice in the Middle East.

We applaud all efforts so far exerted in order to establish and preserve peace, security and stability in the region and we will continue to encourage all those involved to demonstrate patience, perseverance and dedication to the process, whatever the obstacles and regardless of the sacrifices needed. The peace process cannot and must not fail. The road to peace has irreversibly been opened and remains the only way towards achieving the noble dream of present and future generations, a dream of peace, security and prosperity shared by all the peoples of the region.

Mr. Kim Yong Nam, President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

[Original: English]

I extend firm solidarity to you and, through you, to the Palestinian people on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The just cause of the Palestinian people to recover and exercise legitimate national rights including the rights to your country, self-determination and to establish an independent State now enjoys support and encouragement from our people and the world's progressive peoples.

Expressing my conviction that friendly relations between our two countries will continue to develop, I take this opportunity to sincerely wish you successes in your efforts for a just solution of the Palestinian problem.

Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

[Original: Arabic]

I have pleasure in expressing to you and to the members of your distinguished Committee my great appreciation of your devoted efforts to support and promote the just cause of the Palestinian people and to assist it in the exercise of its legitimate and inalienable rights as affirmed by numerous resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and other United Nations bodies.

This year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes at a time when the peace process on the Palestinian track has begun to emerge from a bottleneck and surmount the critical obstacles that were jeopardizing the chances of achieving a just and comprehensive peace which would permit the Palestinian people to exercise all its legitimate rights and guarantee equal security for all without discrimination.

The peace process was frozen for 19 months because of Israel's continued insistence on flouting the will of the international community by refusing to implement the Oslo Accords, building and expanding settlements, pursuing closure and blockade policies, destroying Palestinian homes and expelling their inhabitants, and its continual attempts to alter the status of Al-Quds.

Since the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East problem, the stagnation of the peace process on the Palestinian track has had negative repercussions on the other bilateral tracks as well as on the multilateral negotiations, and has created a climate of hopelessness and frustration not only among the Palestinian people but in the whole region. Those negative repercussions were all-embracing, and as a consequence, confidence collapsed and hope dwindled.

Such was the gloomy atmosphere prevailing in the Middle East when Cairo was host to the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian people held by your distinguished Committee in April 1998.

Then the United States initiative was launched with a view to stimulating the peace process and breaking the deadlock in which it was gripped. The Wye River discussions were held and an interim agreement was signed in Washington on 23 October 1998. On 20 November 1998, we noted with satisfaction Israeli implementation of the first stage of redeployment. We were also pleased to see the first Palestinian prisoners released and, in particular, the inauguration of Gaza airport in November 1998. An Egyptian aircraft was the first to land on its runway.

We trust that this Agreement will continue to be implemented in good faith, and that it will represent a turning point and a step in the right direction. We look forward to the implementation of all its articles within the specified time frame, until the remaining obligations of the interim stage have all been implemented and final status negotiations have begun. We are confident that the latter will lead inevitably to the realization of the aspiration of the Palestinian people to exercise its legitimate and inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, and to establish an independent Palestinian State.

The Oslo Accords provided a strict timetable for implementation that should have been completed by May 1999 at the latest. The intent was to end the twentieth century and the Arab-Israeli conflict at the same time, so that the new millennium need not begin with the same conflict. We hope that this may come to pass by means of the faithful implementation of the Wye River Memorandum and the other agreements and that final status negotiations will be carried out in good faith.

As luck would have it, this year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincides with the Conference to Support Middle East Peace held in Washington in order to mobilize the necessary financial resources to support the endeavours of the Palestinian Authority to raise the standard of living of the Palestinian people and develop the Palestinian economy. We trust that this Conference will win a high level of international commitment from donor States and international organizations in order that these goals may be realized.

Egypt fully appreciates the role of your worthy Committee and affirms its commitment to support both the Committee and the United Nations in dealing with the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East, and to support the peace process - which was begun by Egypt more than 20 years ago - until such time as it reaches its goal. We will spare no effort until we reach that goal, to which we and all those in the world who love peace aspire.

Mr. Lansana Conte, President of the Republic of Guinea

[Original: French]

Sir, on the occasion of the celebration by the international community of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I should like to take this opportunity to address to you, on behalf of the people and Government of the Republic of Guinea, my heartfelt congratulations on the decisive role that the Committee you have been chairing with such untiring devotion continues to play and on the initiatives and actions that it continues to take with a view to discharging its noble mission of restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People, whose heroic struggle is one of the main concerns of the Islamic community of nations. While the Guinean Government takes this opportunity to commend the efforts that led to the signing of the Wye River Memorandum, whose implementation will constitute a new step towards the settlement of the Middle East conflict, it deeply regrets practices which seek to frustrate the efforts being made to secure a lasting peace in the region. I should like to reiterate to you my country's unqualified support for the Palestinian people's struggle to recover its rights and its land. As in the past, the Republic of Guinea will do its utmost to continue to make its modest contribution to achieving the noble goals of independence and respect for the territorial integrity of the sovereign State of Palestine, with Al-Quds as its capital.

Mrs. Janet Jagan, President of the Republic of Guyana

[Original: English]

The Government and the people of the Republic of Guyana wholeheartedly reaffirm their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for their inalienable rights as they observe this year's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Guyana's commitment, which predated its 1976 membership of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in accordance with General Assembly decision 31/318 of 22 December 1976, remains unwavering. The Palestinian people should advance to full political independence and enjoy their inalienable rights of self-determination and freedom.

Guyana is carefully monitoring the Middle East peace process and the implementation of all arrangements in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions. A comprehensive and just solution of the problem of the Middle East cannot be secured until the question of Palestine is resolved.

Resumption of peace talks is indeed heartening, reviving the hope that a just, comprehensive settlement and lasting peace in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations may be achieved in the near future. This is notwithstanding the current seemingly unsurmountable obstacles. The evidence of political will on all sides augurs well for the future.

Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of the Republic of India

[Original: English]

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People reaffirms the international community's continuing commitment to, and support for, the realization of the goals and aspirations of

the Palestinian people. The Day assumes special significance this year because of the forward movement in the Middle East peace process, which has raised hopes of achieving these objectives in the near future.

India has consistently advocated a peaceful resolution of all disputes and, in this context, welcomed the launching of the Middle East peace process and the recent Wye River Memorandum of Understanding signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization on 23 October 1998. India has urged all parties concerned to refrain from taking unilateral steps and to faithfully implement the Memorandum of Understanding. India believes that the MOU will improve the quality of life of the Palestinian people and pave the way to commence final status negotiations so that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace could be achieved in the region on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

It is our hope that the Palestinian people, under the able leadership of Chairman Arafat, who has guided their destinies through their most eventful and critical phases in contemporary times, will be able to realize their dream soon.

India, which has historical ties of friendship with the fraternal people of Palestine, reaffirms its commitment to render all possible help – political, moral and material – to the Palestinian National Authority for the economic reconstruction and development of their region.

Mr. Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie, President of the Republic of Indonesia

[Original: English]

On this solemn occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I should like, on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Indonesia, to reiterate our unswerving support for and solidarity with the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

Our observance of this occasion this year takes place against a sombre backdrop as it coincides with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Al-Nakba, which marked the beginning of the arduous years of dispossession and suffering of the Palestinian population. It is indeed a grievous injustice that nearly five decades since that tragic debacle the issue of Palestine and the just and legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people remain unresolved.

When the Middle East peace process was launched in Madrid in 1991, the international community welcomed it as a positive historic event. Our hopes and optimism were further bolstered by the signing of the peace accords, for they signalled to the world that this persistent issue that had for so long embroiled the region in violent conflict and tension was finally approaching a peaceful resolution.

For two years now, however, the peace process has been in the grip of a stalemate that could lead to dire consequences not only for the region but also for all who have a stake in lasting peace and stability in the region. The plight of the Palestinian people has been worsening and their bitterness and frustration continue to smoulder as they feel betrayed by the Israeli Government. The economic blockade, the settlement activities, the unlawful attempts to alter the status of Jerusalem and impose it as *a fait accompli* and the redeployment of its forces constitute a travesty of the letter and spirit of the peace accords and the principle of land for peace.

Israel's reneging on its international commitments and failure to honour obligations in the transitional period, compounded by its acts of oppression and repression, could result in the return of the

region to a vicious cycle of violence and bloodshed. Israel should heed the voice of reason and resume the peace negotiations in good faith with the valiant leaders of the Palestinian people.

As we approach the close of the transitional period as provided for in the Palestinian-Israeli agreements, it is our fervent hope that the new initiatives of the co-sponsors of the accords will succeed in revitalizing the peace process. It is absolutely crucial that the current situation not be allowed to deteriorate any further. In this regard, Indonesia welcomes the Palestinian-Israeli accord reached at the Wye Plantation on 23 October 1998. It is our hope that this achievement will be followed by the settlement of other substantive issues which will lead to a just and comprehensive peaceful solution.

More than ever before, the Palestinian people need the support of the international community as they face the difficult challenges of this transitional phase. We also believe that it is incumbent on the United Nations to play a leading role in the search for a comprehensive and just settlement of the question of Palestine. Likewise, its agencies and other non-governmental organizations should continue to assist and support the Palestinian people in their just struggle.

From the outset Indonesia has reaffirmed that the question of Palestine is the principal cause of the conflict in the Middle East region and expressed its full solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise their legitimate and inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent homeland with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Ultimately, peace and justice, development and progress can only flourish and grow in the Middle East if Israel unconditionally withdraws from all Palestinian and Arab lands occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights as well as southern Lebanon, through the full implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Finally, I should like to cite the importance of the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in mobilizing the efforts of the international community in support of the sacred Palestinian cause. As a member of the Committee, Indonesia stands committed to extend assistance and cooperation towards the fulfilment of its lofty mandate. The work of the Committee affirms the solidarity of the international community in assisting and supporting the efforts to achieve a stable, comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran

[Original: English]

The anniversary of the Day of Solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine is a propitious opportunity to once again express my firm and full support, and that of the Muslim people of Iran, for the sacred cause of the Palestinian people and their struggle against the oppressive policies of the racist and expansionist Zionist regime.

As the cradle of the messengers of God and also a model of peaceful coexistence of the followers of monotheistic religions, Palestine has always held a special place in the hearts of the justice - and peace-loving Muslim people of Iran. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Palestinian cause became the cornerstone of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is most unfortunate, however, that 50 years after the occupation of Palestine and despite efforts by Islamic countries and proponents of justice to restore the inalienable rights of this persecuted people, their most basic rights have been ignored and relevant United Nations resolutions have been left unfulfilled, because of the unfair support provided to the Zionist regime by a number of States, including the United States of America.

Obviously, Palestine belongs to all Palestinians and only a Government founded through popular participation can be considered legitimate. Therefore, without tackling of the root cause of the crisis, that is, the organized and systematic occupation of the land and the forced mass expulsion of its inhabitants, no genuine solution to the Palestinian crisis can be found.

On the other hand, despite having signed numerous peace agreements and in outright disregard of the repeated demands of the United Nations and the international community, Israel continues to pursue its expansionist strategy and continues to violate the inalienable rights of Palestinians. The expansion of Jewish settlements and the acceleration of the complete Judaization of Jerusalem are all witness to this fact.

With hindsight, the recent agreement concluded in Maryland, like similar previous agreements, can hardly be expected to lead to the full restoration of the inalienable rights of the oppressed Palestinian people. It may instead provide Israel with another window of opportunity to further repress the Palestinians, particularly benefiting the existing discord in the ranks of the Palestinian struggle.

I take this opportunity to once again reaffirm my fair support for the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It is my earnest hope that the Day of Solidarity with the people of Palestine will serve as the beginning of serious cooperation among peace-loving nations and Governments towards establishing a durable, fair and honourable peace in the Middle East.

King Hussein Bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

[Original: Arabic]

It gives me great pleasure and pride to convey to you my sincerest good wishes.

I am pleased to express my thanks for and appreciation of the generous efforts made over many years past by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in order to assist this people and support it in its legitimate struggle to secure its rights and self-determination on the soil of its homeland.

The struggle of the fraternal Palestinian people to recover its legitimate rights has been a constant focus of concern in Jordan and has received our unfailing support ever since the issue first arose. Our support for that people will continue until its inalienable rights, guaranteed by the laws of international legitimacy, have been restored.

Ever since the Middle East peace process began in late 1991 with the Madrid Peace Conference, which was welcomed throughout the world, we have been optimistic that this process would produce positive results with regard to the question of the Palestinian people and its inalienable rights, the most important of which is the right to self-determination on the soil of its homeland.

Despite the difficulties which this process has faced and the obstacles which have impeded its path in past years, increasing and prolonging the suffering and distress of the Palestinian people, the hope will always remain that a breakthrough will be made which will put matters right and set the Palestinian people a step further along the road to restoration of its legitimate rights and the establishment of the future to which it aspires.

The peace we believe in and are working towards is a comprehensive, just and lasting peace that will restore rights where they are due. Any other form of peace will be fragile, unstable and liable to collapse at any moment, returning the region yet again to a state of violence and conflict.

Our concern throughout the past decades has therefore been focused on making a contribution to the creation and upholding of peace, and a sustained commitment to its continuance. At this turning point in the peace process, the international community has an enormous responsibility to stand by the Palestinian people and support its right to self-determination on the soil of its homeland. While it is true that some of its legitimate rights are beginning to be restored to the Palestinian people in the framework of the agreements signed by the Palestinian and Israeli sides, the international community will remain responsible until all the legitimate rights provided for in international agreements have been restored to that people.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People affords the world an annual opportunity to assume its responsibilities towards that people and uphold all the latter's rights.

When we talk about the Palestinian people and its rights, we are talking not only about those Palestinians who have remained steadfastly on their land, but also about those in the diaspora who were forced to leave their homeland. Their right to return to that homeland and to compensation for all the suffering they have endured and the losses they have sustained are guaranteed by international law.

We stress that true peace and a climate of security and stability in this region of the world cannot be achieved while the central issue of the conflict remains unaddressed. That issue includes all aspects and every detail of the question of Palestine. We will continue to look to the international family, which has consistently stood by and supported the right of peoples to self-determination and promoted the settlement of issues by peaceful means, to continue to support the Palestinian people and the peace process that will enable it to exercise its rights on the soil of its homeland, permit the peoples of the region to enjoy the security and prosperity of which they have been deprived for so many years, and devote themselves to building a better future for subsequent generations in a climate of tolerance, justice and equality.

We greatly appreciate the support provided by your distinguished Committee for the Palestinian people and its rights, and hereby express to you our sincere gratitude for and pleasure in your endeavours, which we hope will result in the achievement of the lofty goals for which we strive.

Mr. Khamtay Siphandone, President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

[Original: English]

On this solemn occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to reaffirm on behalf of the Government and people of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as well as on my own behalf, our strong commitment to and unwavering support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

The decision reached at the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 and the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington in 1993 as well as subsequent accords agreed upon by the two parties, the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, have raised hopes for a new era of peace, stability and cooperation for both the Palestinians and the other peoples in the region.

Since the peace process started, the world has witnessed some promising developments in the region. Regrettably, the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory and the existing peace and security still remained in jeopardy.

While recognizing that there remains numerous difficulties to overcome in the peace process in the Middle East, the Lao People's Democratic Republic believes that there can be no durable settlement to the Middle East conflict unless all the occupying forces are withdrawn from all lands occupied since 1967 and that the settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as well as the principle of land for peace.

In this perspective, the Lao People's Democratic Republic welcomes the signing of the Agreement reached between the two parties during the resumed talk, on 23 October 1998 in Wye Plantation. We regard this event as an important step forward and very much hope that it would lead to further efforts to conclude a final comprehensive settlement for the whole region of the Middle East.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, as a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, would like to seize this opportunity to reiterate its full and consistent support for the restoration of the inherent national rights of the Palestinian people and will continue to do so until this noble goal is achieved.

We are confident that, under the resolute leadership of President Arafat, the Palestinian people will triumph in their endeavour to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State in the near future.

Mr. P.B. Mosisili, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho

[Original: English]

It is once again that time of the year when the international community reaffirms its full support for the legitimate struggle of the brave Palestinian people to ensure respect for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, and in this regard to reiterate the demand for Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories including Jerusalem.

On this occasion, on behalf of the people and Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho, I wish to reaffirm Lesotho's full support for the efforts carried out at all levels aimed at finding a comprehensive and just settlement to the Palestinian problem and to the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with the decisions and resolutions of the United Nations.

This year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People assumes a special significance as hopes of putting the peace process back on track are revived. Lesotho welcomes the recent positive events that took place in Washington which we hope will usher in a new era of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Lesotho expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian people and remains prepared to make its modest contribution to ensure peace, justice, stability and coexistence in dignity of the Palestinian people and the entire Middle East region.

Mr. Alfred Sant, Prime Minister of the Republic of Malta

[Original: English]

On this annual commemoration the Government and people of Malta are proud to associate themselves with the peoples and Governments of the world who commemorate this important day.

The question of Palestine is inextricably entwined with the issue of security and peace in the Mediterranean. Malta has always given utmost importance to this issue and we therefore look forward to positive developments emanating from the Wye River Memorandum.

We strongly believe in peace through dialogue and therefore wholeheartedly support the Oslo peace process. As we look forward to the new millennium, which commemorates the birth, in the land of Palestine, of the messenger of peace, Jesus Christ, we hope that peace will reign in the region to the benefit of all the peoples of the region.

Malta is proud to have served as the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since its inception and will continue to give its contribution in this Committee.

Mr. Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, President of Mexico

[Original: Spanish]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to convey my country's pleasure in celebrating this highly significant date and to reiterate our support for the international community's call for peace and friendship in the region of the Middle East.

Mexico has observed with great interest the recent progress towards peace and supports efforts to promote the fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and the strengthening of peace in the Middle East in accordance with the recognized principles of international law and with United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

On this solemn occasion, I wish to express the hope that the recent renewal of dialogue will produce lasting results which will promote the transformation of this region into a place of peaceful coexistence, cooperation and harmony.

Accept, Sir, our best wishes for the success of all the activities carried out in connection with this Day and the assurances of my highest consideration.

Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia

[Original: English]

At this occasion of commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the people of Palestine, 30 November 1998, I would like, on behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Namibia, and indeed on my own behalf, to express our continuing support to the Palestinian people in their struggle for the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

As we are following developments in the Middle East, it has become abundantly clear that the task of consolidating peace in the region requires genuine and honest commitment from all parties concerned. We are, however, encouraged by the significant progress that was achieved in recent weeks and trust that the impetus would be maintained to ensure success for your just cause.

Once again, we would like to express our solidarity with the people of Palestine in their search for ever-lasting peace, socio-economic development and prosperity.

Mr. Ibrahim Mainassara Bare, President of the Republic of Niger

[Original: French]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it gives me great pleasure to reaffirm the unflinching support of the Government and people of the Niger for the legitimate struggle that the courageous Palestinian people is waging to recover its inalienable rights in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

The Niger particularly welcomes the signing on 23 October 1998 of the Wye River Memorandum, which has given a new impetus to the peace process after the stalemate of the past several months and has paved the way for fresh progress in the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians with a view to achieving a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, which is the core of the Middle East conflict.

The Niger also takes this opportunity to congratulate the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the remarkable manner in which it has been discharging its duty of informing international public opinion about issues relating to the question of Palestine in order to promote efforts to find a negotiated political solution.

While remaining convinced that the realization of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people is a prerequisite for the attainment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, my country fervently hopes that the international community will intensify its efforts to ensure that such rights prevail.

Mr. Mohammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

[Original: English]

Pakistan today joins the international community in solemnly observing the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People by reaffirming its total commitment to the cause of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

We remain committed to the goal of a just and durable peace in the Middle East based on the principle of land for peace and the full realization of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people including their right to self-determination and statehood.

We are heartened by the recent progress made towards the resumption of the Middle East process and the Wye Agreement reached in this regard. In this connection we note the political determination and sagacious policies of the Palestinian leadership to pursue the course of peace with justice which should be reciprocated by all concerned.

It is imperative that the international community, particularly the United Nations, continue to encourage, assist and support the peace process and to provide urgent assistance to the Palestinian National Authority, to help relieve the sufferings of the Palestinian people for rebuilding their devastated economy.

Mr. Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of the Republic of Poland

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People I am sending you, Mr. President, in the name of the Polish people and in my own, our warmest regards and best wishes.

The signing of the Wye River Memorandum on 23 October 1998 has been welcomed with great optimism by the Republic of Poland. Poland has also welcomed with satisfaction the ratification of the Memorandum by the Parliament of Israel on 17 November 1998. This should bring the peace process back on track and clear the way for permanent status negotiations and towards peace and stability.

Poland attached great importance to the traditional bonds of friendship and cooperation with the Palestinian people. We are always ready to support all your efforts to exercise your inalienable rights.

I wish you, Excellency, and the Palestinian people, the successful implementation of the Memorandum. It is my hope that this progress will help you in finding the solution to some other political and security problems and will stimulate the economic growth of the Middle East region.

Mr. President, I would like to extend to you the best wishes for success in your personal life and good health.

Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar

[Original: Arabic]

I am pleased to address you on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, when the whole international community expresses its heartfelt support for this great people. The time has now come for the Palestinian people to be freed from the injustice and subjugation it has endured during the long years of occupation, killing and displacement, and for it to be enabled to exercise self-determination and establish an independent State on all its national territory.

As you are aware, during the last 18 months the peace process has witnessed some regrettable negative developments because of the intransigence of the Israeli Government. No progress has been made and the Palestinian people has endured all manner of suffering and oppression. We all therefore welcomed the interim agreement concluded in Washington in October 1998, in the hope that it would build confidence between the two parties and open the door to final status negotiations in accordance with the Oslo Accords, restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and ensure security for both sides. However, all those hopes are currently dependent upon commitment being shown to the agreements that were reached, genuine implementation thereof in good faith and the suspension of unilateral acts such as settlement building and the expropriation of land that have a negative impact on the peace process.

The Israeli Government must, without question, halt the blockades of areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority that prevent thousands of workers from reaching their employment in Israel and bring severe economic hardship to the Palestinian people, thousands of whom live below the poverty line and are deprived of the most basic rights, such as the right to clean drinking water, medical care, education and access to electrical power. We therefore call upon the international community to respond to the essential requests of the Palestinian people in order to enable it to establish the necessary infrastructure and provide employment opportunities.

On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it behooves the international community to remember the suffering of millions of Palestinians, including those languishing in Israeli prisons, the refugees and displaced persons in camps inside Palestine and in neighbouring countries, and those in the diaspora. We must recall their legitimate right to return to the soil of their homeland and to live in security, like all other peoples, on their own land and under their own sky, and to take part with other peoples in human development.

In conclusion, I must express to you and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People our great appreciation for your sterling efforts, which have played a large part in garnering international support for the just cause of the Palestinian people. We pray that almighty God will grant your endeavours every success and that the great Palestinian people will realize its aspiration to establish an independent State on its own land.

Mr. Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation

[Original: Russian]

[Addressed to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am pleased to convey to you and all Palestinians my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes.

This year, that date has special significance. Ten years ago, the Palestine National Council took a decision on the proclamation of a Palestinian State. This set a strategic task and expressed the persistent desire of the Palestinian people to pursue their national interests and realize their peace-loving aspirations. Today, when the self-government of the Palestinians has become a reality and negotiations are beginning on the final status of the Palestinian territories, the achievement of these momentous goals is drawing closer.

The Middle East peace process, despite great difficulties, is moving forward and clearly proves that the path of negotiation can and must guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, including their inalienable right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State.

We appreciate the value of the constructive approach and political wisdom of the Palestinian leadership, which made a historic choice in favour of peace, security and good-neighbourliness. The Russian Federation, as a co-sponsor of the peace process, will continue to do everything possible in order to achieve a comprehensive and equitable settlement and establish stability and cooperation in the Middle East.

I wish you, my dear Sir, success on this path, and to the fraternal Palestinian people, prosperity and well-being.

Fahd Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King of Saudi Arabia

[Original: Arabic]

The Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is pleased to participate in the international community's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People - a people that continues to struggle for the restitution of its legitimate and inalienable rights in the cause of which many victims have been sacrificed - and commends your Committee for its endeavours, urging it to continue its laudable efforts until such time as the usurped rights of the Palestinian people are restored and the latter establishes an independent State on the soil of its homeland, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Saudi Arabia's participation in the observance of this International Day which gives concrete expression to the suffering of the Palestinian people stems from its commitment to the purposes and principles enshrined in those international instruments that affirm the right of peoples to self-determination, the foremost of which is the Charter of the United Nations. The Palestinian people is the epitome of a people deprived of its rights. Since the emergence of the question of Palestine, Saudi Arabia has been unstinting in its provision of aid at all levels to those affected, and in supporting the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people and the right of the latter to establish an independent State. In this context, it has supported the peace process begun at Madrid in 1991 which led to direct negotiations being conducted between the Israeli and Palestinian sides and gave rise to bilateral agreements requiring Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories and the transfer of further powers to the Palestinian National Authority. Saudi Arabia also joined the countries assisting the Palestinian National Authority by providing financial aid in the amount of US$ 300 million.

The Government of Saudi Arabia has been monitoring current developments in the Palestinian arena and the deadlock in the peace process and is greatly concerned at Israel's intransigence, which has created a state of impotence and paralysis in the whole peace process. Israel's uncompromising policy has emptied the agreements reached with the Palestinian side of their basic substance and has ignored the principles for peace to which Israel committed itself with the Palestinian side before the international community. Israel continues to implement its settlement policy in the occupied territories and is subjecting the self-rule areas to all manner of deprivation, starvation and collective punishment by means of closures and blockades. It is instituting measures and plans to alter the identity of Al-Quds and impose a new status quo there that will expose the region to increased violence and instability.

The established position of the Government of Saudi Arabia is to support the peace efforts aimed at ending Israel's occupation of Arab territory and implementing the relevant United Nations resolutions, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) in particular, and the agreements concluded at the Madrid Conference. This position is consonant with the statement issued by the Arab leaders at their 1996 Summit in Cairo to the effect that the peace process represents a strategic goal and an irrevocable choice. Saudi Arabia therefore calls upon the members of the international community to bring every pressure to bear on Israel to comply with the resolutions adopted with respect to the Palestinian people and to accede to the international desire that it comply with the obligations it has entered into vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority and the international community and desist from raising obstacles to peace. At the same time, it is essential that any comprehensive and lasting settlement should also cover the issues of the return of the Palestinian refugees, the release of prisoners and the settlements. The settlements are

incompatible with all United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 465 (1980) and the principles of international law.

The issue of Al-Quds represents the essence of the Arab-Israeli conflict and will remain the focus of the concerns of the Arab and Islamic worlds and the core of the Palestine problem. Israeli practices and the violations perpetrated in that holy city must therefore inevitably have negative repercussions on the whole peace process, particularly since the aim of such practices is to Judaize the city of Al-Quds and alter its religious characteristics. This threatens to undermine the peace process and to end all hope of peace in the region. Saudi Arabia therefore urges the international community, and the United States of America in particular, to take positive and immediate action to end Israeli intransigence with respect to the most delicate and sensitive aspects of the peace process. Israel must deal with the question of Al-Quds on the understanding that that is the most important issue in the dossier on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and that it must be resolved at the stage determined by the peace process and in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and Security Council resolution 242 (1967) in particular, which requires Israel to withdraw from the Arab territories occupied in 1967, and resolution 252 (1968) relating to Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The Government of Saudi Arabia takes this opportunity to urge the international community to seize the initiative and bring pressure to bear on Israel to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy, the principles of international law, the agreements reached at the Madrid Conference and the agreements signed with the Palestinian side, thereby restoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, guaranteeing the stability of the region and serving all its peoples.

Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal

[Original: French]

The celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People gives me the welcome opportunity to reaffirm my total support, and that of the Government and people of Senegal, for the just struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and the creation of its own State.

For more than half a century the question of Palestine, which is the core of the Middle East crisis, has preoccupied the international community. The United Nations Security Council and General Assembly have adopted numerous resolutions calling for respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

In the past few months the international community has noted several obstacles that have arisen in the path of the peace process, which, as a result, is under serious threat.

However, with the Wye River Memorandum, there is renewed hope.

On this solemn occasion, permit me once more to congratulate President Bill Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan warmly for their decisive roles in the elaboration of this legal instrument, which makes a natural contribution to the resumption and revitalization of the Madrid and Oslo processes.

Furthermore, I am absolutely convinced that proper and sedulous implementation of the Wye River Memorandum will help to save the peace process and re-establish trust between the parties.

With this in mind, the United Nations must continue to play its historic role in this matter, on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

I should also like to express my appreciation of the tireless efforts made by His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and to encourage the sponsors of the peace process to continue and intensify their own efforts to seek a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

In the same spirit, it gives me pleasure to pay tribute to the excellent work done in order to further this noble cause by the Chairman and the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

The commitment, determination and courage shown by President Yasser Arafat in the constant search for a "peace of the brave", which will safeguard the higher interests of his people and of peace and stability in the region, must also be applauded.

While extending to him every encouragement, I should like to invite all States Members of the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, the European Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and all inter- and non-governmental organizations and financial institutions, to increase their assistance to the Palestinian people in view, in particular, of the imminent celebration in Bethlehem of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ.

As far as my Government is concerned, both it and the whole Senegalese people will continue to support and show active solidarity for the fraternal Palestinian people in its struggle to regain its dignity.

Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

[Original: English]

On behalf of the Government and people of Sri Lanka, I have great pleasure in conveying our warm felicitations and best wishes to His Excellency President Yasser Arafat and the people of the State of Palestine, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Sri Lanka shares the satisfaction of the international community on the progress so far achieved in Palestinian-Israel negotiations, for peace between the two parties, despite delays and obstacles. We welcome the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization on 23 October 1998 in Washington, D.C.

The Government and the people of Sri Lanka wish to reiterate their firm support for the Palestinian people's quest for the realization of their national inalienable rights.

Mr. Chuan Leekpai, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand

[Original: English]

On the very auspicious occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour, on behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, to reaffirm our full support for the Middle East peace process and to express our congratulations on the successful conclusion of the interim peace accord, generally known as the Wye River Memorandum. The signing of this Memorandum

constitutes a major breakthrough towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for the people of Palestine, based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

For our part, Thailand has followed the development of the Middle East peace negotiations with keen interest. It is therefore encouraging for us to see that the internationally accepted spirit and determination of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 and its subsequent implementation agreements are well enshrined in the Wye River Memorandum. Once again, the cherished goal of a durable peace in the Middle East lies within reach. However, in order for the success of this agreement to be complete, it is essential that the peace accord be implemented faithfully and vigorously. Mutual trust and sincerity of both sides are vital.

While struggling to achieve peace through political dialogue, one should not ignore the human element of the conflict. The plight of the Palestinian refugees and displaced persons in the occupied territories warrants the close attention of the international community. It is also imperative for all parties concerned to abide by the basic principles of human rights enshrined in the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Finally, on behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, I should like to reiterate our firm conviction concerning the principles of Palestinian self-determination and economic self-reliance. It is our sincere hope that lasting peace and stability will eventually reign supreme in this holy land.

Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia

[Original: Arabic]

Today Tunisia joins the international community in commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This Day is an occasion for the country to reaffirm its solidarity with the fraternal people of Palestine in its struggle to regain all its rights, including the right to establish an independent State with its capital at Al-Quds.

Tunisia has a commitment to truth and justice and a belief in the right of peoples to self-determination. It has supported every stage of the peace process and has consistently worked to promote the latter's success. It therefore recalls the principles on which that process was based, foremost among which is the principle of land for peace and the understanding that undertakings and agreements concluded in the framework of international legitimacy must be honoured. At the same time, Tunisia affirms the need for concerted efforts to be made in order to protect the peace process from further disruption or deterioration and promote world peace and security.

Tunisia applauds the United Nations General Assembly for the resolution it recently adopted deciding to upgrade the status of the Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, and greatly appreciates the sustained endeavours made by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in order to secure and defend those rights.

Tunisia calls upon the international community, and in particular the two sponsors of the peace process and the European Union, to intensify efforts to provide increased support for that process and to uphold the international legitimacy which nurtures it, with a view to creating the climate essential to the finding of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace that will guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, restore to the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon their occupied territories and enable all the peoples of the region to live in security, peace and prosperity.

Tunisia affirms that it will continue to provide strong and firm support to the Palestinian people in its struggle to achieve its legitimate aspirations to self-determination and to establish an independent State in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principles of international legitimacy.

Mr. Mesut Yilmaz, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to affirm once again our continuing support to the Palestinian people for attaining their legitimate rights.

The International Solidarity Day highlights the fact that the unresolved plight of the Palestinian people lies at the core of all the troubles in the Middle East region. So long as the Palestinians are denied their inalienable rights, peace and stability will elude the region and other conflicts in the Middle East region will also be more difficult to cope with.

Turkey has viewed the onset of the Middle East peace process as one of the major events of the recent past. A lot of hope, effort and resources have been invested in the process in the expectation that it would finally bring stability and security to this conflict-fatigued region. Turkey still believes that the peace process remains to be the only realistic and preferable way for meeting the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Turkey wholeheartedly wishes that the twenty-first century will be a century of peace and cooperation. We also wish to visualize a grand scheme of peace in the Middle East with the full restitution of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has been successful over the years in promoting wider awareness within the international community for the plight of the Palestinian people, thus securing stronger support for their legitimate cause.

I avail myself of this opportunity to reiterate the best wishes of the Turkish nation and the Turkish Government to the Palestinian people in their determined efforts for the realization of their legitimate aspirations, within the framework of a just and comprehensive peace.

Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates

[Original: Arabic]

On behalf of the Government and people of the United Arab Emirates, I am pleased to convey to you and to the distinguished members of the Committee my great appreciation of and thanks for the earnest efforts you make with a view to winning recognition from the international community for the justice of the Palestinian cause and of the facts and circumstances surrounding each stage of the issue, and in particular those clearly exposed by the series of serious violations committed on a daily basis by the Israeli Government against the Palestinian and other Arab peoples suffering under the tyranny of an occupation that contravenes the principles of international humanitarian law.

On the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we are pleased to reaffirm our full and unconditional support for that people's aspirations to

liberate its occupied territory and recover its inalienable rights, including the rights to return and to self-determination, and to establish an independent State on the soil of its homeland with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

The tokens of sincere good faith and the courageous confidence-building measures constantly offered by the Palestinian people and its leadership, as represented by the Palestinian Authority, with a view to bringing about a just, lasting and comprehensive peace inside its homeland on the basis of peaceful coexistence, the Madrid Peace Conference on the Middle East and the other contractual agreements based on the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of land for peace, are daily thwarted by the practices used by the current Israeli Government against the Palestinian people. The gravest of such practices is that Government's insistent and systematic recourse to the expropriation of land, property and natural resources and the building and expansion of illegal settlements in all parts of the occupied territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in order to consolidate the occupation and impose the status quo with a view to altering the legal, demographic and cultural status of those territories.

Israel is continuing its attempts to desecrate the traditional, religious and, in particular, Islamic holy places in the cities of Al-Quds and Hebron, and pursues policies, inter alia, of blockade, collective punishment, arrest, arbitrary killing and starvation. This is to be regarded as a material and legal breach of all the principles informing the peace process in the Middle East and of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns these dangerous policies and, pursuant to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, considers them invalid and illegal. It calls upon the United Nations and all peace-loving States, foremost of which are the sponsors of the peace process and the European Union and its member States, to assume their responsibilities and to take all necessary and additional measures to put pressure on the Government of Israel and induce it to withdraw from all the Palestinian and Arab lands it occupies, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and to completely halt forthwith all its hostile and provocative violations, which throw a dangerous pall not only over the Palestinian people but also over the issue of peace, security and stability in the region and the whole world.

In closing, we urge your Committee to provide greater support and assistance to the promotion of the cause of the Palestinian people with the international community, and to provide that people with increased political, financial and development assistance in order to alleviate its suffering and enable it to build the development, economic and social institutions that will help to achieve stability, security and prosperity for the Palestinian people, in common with other peoples.

Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People organized by the United Nations (29 November), I would like to extend to Your Exellencies, and through Your Excellencies to the Palestinian people, our greetings of solidarity and warmest wishes.

The Government and people of Viet Nam welcome the recent process in the Middle East peace process achieved by the signing of the 23 October 1998 Memorandum between Palestine and Israel. We hope that these agreements will be fully implemented, and that the parties concerned will overcome existing obstacles in order to achieve a just and durable peace in the Middle East on the basis of ensuring

the fundamental and inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people as well as the legitimate interests of the parties concerned.

On this occasion, the Government and the people of Viet Nam reaffirm their consistent support for the just cause of the Palestinian people. We are confident that, under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Palestinian people will certainly achieve complete victory.

Mr. Robert Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe

[Original: English]

On behalf of the Government and people of Zimbabwe, I join you in commemorating this important day - the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. While it is a day of celebration of the resilience and perseverance of the Palestinian people in their quest for justice and freedom, it is also one on which we are reminded of the suffering and denial of self-determination that the Palestinian people have endured for the past five or so decades. We are therefore also reminded of our own obligations and responsibilities to the Palestinians in their struggle for independence and statehood.

After many agonizing months during which the peace process was in paralysis, we are pleased to note that this year's celebrations are once again filled with hope and optimism - hope and optimism engendered by the signing last month of the Wye River Memorandum. We were nevertheless disappointed that before the ink had dried on that document delays were already being experienced in its implementation.

I urge both parties, particularly the Government of Israel, to shun the expediency of finding excuses for failing or deliberately delaying the implementation of this and other Agreements they freely entered into. The trust and confidence in each other represented in your mutual understandings reflected in this Memorandum must not, once again, be eroded. It should be nurtured for peace, security and stability to prevail.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm my Government and country's continued support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their unrelenting and peaceful quest for justice, freedom and independence.

B. Messages from Governments

Uruguay

[Original: Spanish]

The Government of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, hopes for the consolidation of a lasting peace that will promote the well-being of the Palestinian people, guarantee their rights and ensure the stability of the countries of the region.

It reaffirms its strongest support for the peace process, as the sole valid instrument for achieving peaceful coexistence, within the framework of international law and the principles of the United Nations.

It therefore welcomes the renewed impetus to the talks aimed at seeking solutions based on good faith and mutual respect for the peoples of the region.

C. Messages from Ministers for Foreign Affairs

Mr. D. Guido Di Tella, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Commerce and Worship of the Republic of Argentina

[Original: Spanish]

On the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government of the Argentine Republic wishes to reaffirm once again its support for this important commemoration.

We wish to reiterate our firm conviction that there is no alternative to peace in the Middle East. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), together with the Madrid and Oslo agreements, set forth the necessary elements for achieving a just and lasting peace in the region. The Government of Argentina views with satisfaction and hope the Wye River Memorandum signed on 23 October 1998 which, in its view, is a fresh and vital impetus to the peace process and a significant vehicle of confidence-building between the parties. It demonstrates, moreover, that where there is genuine will to negotiate and a spirit of compromise, it is always possible to reach an understanding.

The Government of Argentina greatly looks forward to the visit of the President of the Palestine Authority, Yasser Arafat, to the Argentine Republic at the earliest possible date.

The Argentine Republic believes that peace and development cannot be dissociated and, insofar as possible, wishes to cooperate in improving the quality of life of the Palestinian people. For that reason, through the White Helmets programme, it has participated in a town planning project in Gaza City, which was successfully completed and, at the same time, helped to train Palestinian professionals who will be able to assume responsibility for a future project for the three municipalities of Gaza. There are plans to extend this project to the West Bank. Similarly, the possibility of the White Helmets participating in technical activities related to "Bethlehem 2000" is being explored jointly with the Palestinian authorities, and projects to assist vulnerable groups in Gaza are being evaluated. In 1998, a project to strengthen social networks through sports for children and youth in the Gaza Strip was also carried out.

The Argentine Republic fully supports the efforts made by the United States of America and by the countries of the region to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and reaffirms its support for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in its own territory and to the right of its neighbours to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, under the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Mr. Guillermo Fernandez de Soto, Minister for External Relations of the Republic of Colombia

[Original: Spanish]

Colombia has always affirmed its support for the Palestinian people throughout the fluctuating peace negotiations process in the Middle East. It will also continue to support the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and to question acts and measures contrary to this just aspiration.

The heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, in a statement recently adopted, once again stressed the importance which the Movement attaches to the question of Palestine, and our countries' commitment to the Palestinian people's hopes for self-determination.

In the same spirit, Colombia wishes once again to affirm its support for the implementation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Jerusalem, and for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), which are the cornerstone of the international community's position on this matter.

Consistent with the position of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Colombia has deplored the implementation of measures that violate the provisions of the Oslo, Cairo, Madrid and Washington agreements. At the same time, it has strongly urged the international community in general, and the United Nations in particular, to redouble their humanitarian efforts for the Palestinian population in the occupied territories.

My country lauds the efforts made with a view to seeking a peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East. We therefore strongly applaud and congratulate the parties on the signing of the Wye River Memorandum.

Similarly, Colombia believes that time is a great ally until the bases for agreement are established, but also that inordinate delays dilute successes and heighten uncertainty.

Colombia encourages the parties to continue their efforts to achieve a lasting solution and, at the same time, urges the international community to support all efforts to that end.

Lastly, I wish to assure the Palestinian people that Colombia, aware of the responsibility of all nations for peace in the Middle East and the future of the region, will continue to make every effort to lend its assistance with a view to achieving a permanent solution to the conflict.

Mr. José Ayala Lasso, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to be held on 30 November 1998, I am pleased to present the cordial and fraternal compliments of the people and Government of my country on this important date and, at the same time, to confirm Ecuador's support for the commendable work carried out by the Committee of which you are Chairman, aimed at analysing and spreading worldwide awareness of the plight of the Palestinian population in the occupied Arab territories.

The Government of Ecuador notes with satisfaction the worthy efforts being made to sustain the peace talks among Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis and hopes that the peace process will proceed and thereby ensure respect for the principles of international law and the irreversible promotion of peaceful coexistence among those peoples. In this way, mutual cooperation and development will constitute the pillars on which to base the acceleration of progress and the strengthening of peaceful and friendly relations.

I wish to affirm solidarity with the Palestinian people, on behalf of my country and in my own behalf, and am certain that you will achieve positive results in your future endeavours.

Mr. Masahiko Koumura, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan

[Original: English]

On behalf of the Government of Japan, I wish to offer my sincere congratulations on the occasion of the United Nations International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I should like to express my respect and admiration for the Palestinian people for their tireless endeavours during the past year in pursuing their legitimate rights and the achievement of peace in the Middle East

Japan was greatly encouraged by the signing of the Wye River Agreement in the United States, the result of difficult peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis which had been stalled for a year and a half. While the current peace process has produced a number of significant results towards the settlement of the dispute in the Middle East, as the negotiations entered an increasing difficult stage, the international community voiced concern that the peace process was in crisis. However, the Wye River Memorandum has shown that the Oslo process, which has the full support of the intemationel community, including Japan, continues to serve as a driving force to advance the negotiations even at this difficult stage. Both parties should now implement the agreement in good faith and without delay. They should also make utmost efforts to tackle the final status negotiations, in accordance with the statement in the Memorandum that "the two sides will make a determined effort to achieve the mutual goal of reaching an agreement by May". The Oslo Accords have set aside three years for the final status negotiations in view of the many extremely difficult issues to be covered in them. However, the days ahead will be a crucial period in the peace process, which will test the leadership of the leaders of both parties. Only five months remain; I believe, however, that if the Palestinians and Israelis will concentrate their wisdom on the negotiations, a satisfactory outcome for both sides can surely be reached by 4 May 1999.

Japan will extend as much support as possible for such efforts by the parties. Japan has so far provided economic assistance of more than $370 million to the Palestinians, making it one of the largest donors of such assistance. We fully recognize that international economic assistance for the development and stability of the West Bank and Gaza remains essential in order to support the peace process at this most difficult stage. We will continue to make such efforts.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my sincere hope that the parties will continue their endeavours towards the achievement of peace, without losing the momentum generated by the Wye River Memorandum, and that their efforts, as well as those of the international community, will bear fruit and that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace will be established in the Middle East in the near future.

Mr. Yousef Bin Alawi Bin Abdullah, Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman

[Original: Arabic]

As we once more mark our annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I take pleasure in expressing sincere thanks and appreciation to you and all members of your distinguished Committee for your earnest endeavours and tireless and unceasing work in support of the Palestinian people and in affirmation of its legitimate rights to the recovery of its land and the establishment of an independent State. We should also like to express to you our warm recognition of the efforts you have made at all levels in order to alleviate the suffering of the fraternal Palestinian people caused by the burden of tyrannical occupation.

While once again participating in the annual observance of this important occasion, prompted by our support for the legitimate demand of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and to live in security and peace on the soil of its homeland, Oman wishes to commend the efforts made by the Palestinian National Authority and to express its support for the Authority and for the agreements it has concluded in the course of tireless negotiations with the Israeli side. We hope that such agreements will benefit the Palestinian people and that it will realize its just and legitimate hopes, aspirations and demands.

This year, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincides with the global celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We take this opportunity to urge Israel to take immediate steps to restore confidence and implement the agreements concluded with the Palestinian side, the last of which was the Wye River Memorandum, and to continue to the very end with the process of resolving this problem, in order to find the security and peace to which we aspire. In this context, we should like to express our appreciation for the role played by the United States, to clasp its hand and urge it to continue its important and effective efforts, in view of the pressing need to strengthen the bases of peace by implementing agreements in a manner that will promote peaceful coexistence between the Arabs and Israel.

In conclusion, we acknowledge the appreciable efforts made by your Committee to support the Palestinian National Authority, and affirm our backing for those efforts and for your continuing endeavours to involve donor countries and financial and charitable institutions in important development projects to benefit the Palestinians who so desperately need them.

Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic

[Original: Arabic]

I wish to convey to you my appreciation for the role played by your Committee in organizing this important international gathering, and the pleasure that it gives me to join you in an observance that the United Nations has dedicated to the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The peace process in the Middle East is going through a difficult and complex period because of Israel's disavowal of the principles on the basis of which that process began in Madrid, which call for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and of the land-for-peace formula, and because Israel has reneged on the undertakings and agreements entered into during the peace discussions sponsored and contributed to by the United States.

In the past year, the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation has increased because of Israeli policies and practices with regard to the expropriation of land, seizure of property, destruction of homes and building and expansion of settlements, in the city of Al-Quds in particular, together with continual blockades and arrests of Palestinians in flagrant violation of international law, international conventions and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Palestinian people will not submit to oppression and the continuation of the occupation. It is struggling courageously for the restoration of its legitimate national rights, foremost of which are the rights to self-determination and to establish an independent State and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes from which they were expelled, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Syrian Arab Republic will continue to defend the just cause of the Palestinian people and is committed to striving for the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace based on full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the restoration of usurped rights.

From this international platform, we call upon the co-sponsors of the peace process and upon the international community to meet their responsibilities by compelling Israel to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy demanding the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and from southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa and guaranteeing the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. We also use this platform to call upon the international community to be mindful of the grave danger posed by the Israeli Government's persistence in adopting positions and policies inimical to peace and practices which violate the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, and its refusal to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

We send appreciative and affectionate greetings to the Palestinian people inside and outside the occupied Palestinian territories, affirming our resolute support for it in its just and legitimate struggle.

We acclaim the efforts made by your distinguished Committee, which has been untiring in its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people. Together with the international community, we look forward to the day when the region can enjoy a just and comprehensive peace that will ensure security and stability for all peoples of the region.

Mr. Borys Tarasyuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine

[Original: English]

I wish to extend to you my warmest congratulations on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Over the past one and a half year we have seen an alarming stalemate in the Middle East peace process. Fortunately, on 23 October 1998, a new hope emerged with the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement. We in Ukraine commend the good work accomplished by the negotiating sides and maintain the view that in the nearest future they will succeed in establishing a comprehensive, durable and just peace in the region to which we all aspire. For this to happen, the parties concerned are welcome to restore in full measure the mutual confidence and conduct the negotiations in a spirit of good will and cooperation. We strongly hold that these are the much-needed conditions in which both the Palestinians and Israelis will find it easier to pursue the process.

Being one of the founding Members of the United Nations and an active member of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ukraine sincerely supports legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for justice, freedom and dignity, which are to culminate logically in the attainment of the inalienable right of self-determination. We in Ukraine remain optimistic about this perspective and therefore express our firm belief that the Palestinian people will further persevere in their pursuit of a policy of assuming nation-building responsibilities and creating along with the Israeli people an environment favourable for lasting peace in the region.

I would like to stress that the Palestinian people, who have traditionally aroused broad interest and sympathy in my country, can rely upon Ukraine's support in advancing the Middle East peace process. In this regard, I wish to pledge that Ukraine is ready, taking into account its economic, cultural and scientific potential, to expand fruitful Ukrainian-Palestinian relations.

Mr. Chairman, it gives me pleasure to emphasize that my country greatly appreciates the Committee's strong, unambiguous support for the rights of the Palestinian people and traditionally welcomes the initiatives taken by this esteemed body with the view to achieving a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and promoting a dialogue between the parties concerned.

Availing myself of this opportunity, I would like to wish every success to you, Mr. Chairman, and to the parties to the Middle East peace process.

D. Messages from intergovernmental organizations having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly and maintaining permanent offices at Headquarters

European Union: Dr. Wolfgang Schussel, President of the Council of Ministers

[Original: English]

On the occasion of this special day I should like to express the solidarity of the European Union with the Palestinian people.

The European Union was always firmly committed to a just and comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East and has therefore wholeheartedly supported the Madrid and Oslo accords, which initiated the ongoing peace process. Here we recall the essential principles on which such a settlement should be based and which have been enshrined in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. Among the key elements essential for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and durable solution I should like to mention here the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people, without excluding the option of a State, and land for peace.

After a long and dangerous impasse the European Union was glad to welcome the signature of the Wye River Memorandum between the PLO and Israel, which again set the peace process into motion. Now it is important that the agreement reached is being implemented without delay and that the parties refrain from any unilateral actions which might prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

Europe is convinced that it has much to offer for the success of the peace process and therefore is determined to continue to play an active role in it, enhancing it in all its aspects. The European Union will continue its considerable economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people with the aim of contributing to the economic development and to ensure the viability of the Palestinian entity which will result from the exercise of self-determination.

During my recent mission to the Middle East I reaffirmed the afore-mentioned position of the European Union regarding the rights of the Palestinian people in my political talks in all the countries of the region.

Organization of the Islamic Conference: Mr. Azeddine Laraki, Secretary-General

[Original: English]

In accordance with resolution 32/40 B adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1977, the international community commemorates on 29 November of every year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This has been a clear manifestation of the support of the international community to the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people aimed at recovering their inalienable national rights.

On this occasion, I have the pleasure to extend the gratitude and appreciation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its member States, to the United Nations and its various bodies and organs, for their laudable efforts in publicizing the justness of the cause of Palestine, and extending assistance and support to the Palestinian people.

After a long stalemate in the Middle East peace process, the whole world has lately seen a renewed hope in furthering the cause of peace by the signing of the Wye River Memorandum between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel. We would like to avail ourselves of this opportunity to commend the valuable efforts exercised by those who made it possible to bring closer the positions of the two sides and reach the needed agreement.

At this stage, and while we support the implementation of the first phase of the provisions of the Wye River Memorandum, and the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from certain areas of the West Bank, we would like to stress the need for a proper and unconditional implementation of the Memorandum, including the release of the specified Palestinian political prisoners, so as to defuse any tension in the region and commence the negotiations on the further issues concerning the final status of the occupied territories.

But unfortunately, since the signing of the Wye River Memorandum, we have witnessed some disturbing developments that have taken place in the Palestinian territories, particularly the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. In a flagrant violation of international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy, as well as the agreements concluded within the framework of the peace process, the Israeli Government has issued a permit for Jewish settlers to resume work at a planned Jewish settlement in the area of Ras al-Amud in the heart of the Arab sector of the occupied city of Al-Quds. Moreover, Israel has announced the building of 200 housing units in the settlement of "Kiryat Arba" in the city of Al-Khalil (Hebron) in the West Bank, as well as resuming construction work in the settlement of "Har Homa" on Abu Ghneim mountain. In addition to these, there are also plans to build new settlements and to expand the existing ones, as well as illegally confiscating a further 10 per cent of the area of the West Bank, all at the expense of Arab land and property. There have even been calls by Israeli officials to expand the settlements and take control of more Palestinian lands. These measures and practices will only lead to more tension in the region which might one day escalate beyond our control and endanger the whole peace process. They also constitute a flagrant violation of the established positions of the international community that settlements are illegal, and that the presence of settlers in the occupied territory since 1967 is clearly illegal under international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the numerous relevant resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

These actions are also coupled by the continued illegal and inhuman measures pursued by the Israeli occupation authorities in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories. These include measures and practices taken illegally and unilaterally with the aim of altering the character, demographic composition and legal status of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, thus trying to

implement a new "fait accompli". The occupation authorities still refuse to implement the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War. They also seek to undermine the unity of the Palestinian territories and to hinder the free movement of persons and goods. Obstacles are being placed in the way of developing the Palestinian economy, and the Palestinian people are being subjected to measures of collective punishment. This has caused a severe deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian people and deprived them of their basic human rights.

Ever since its initiation in Madrid, the Organization of the Islamic Conference has declared its support to the Middle East peace process aimed at reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The continued negation of the United Nations resolutions and of implementing the concluded agreements and commitments undermines the basic principles on which this process has been launched.

All peace-loving countries and peoples are called upon to coordinate their efforts in a way to compel Israel to refrain from its illegal measures and activities in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Palestinian territories, to halt the settlement activity and lift inhuman and illegal measures being implemented against the Palestinian people.

The international community, especially the co-sponsors of the peace process, are called upon to act firmly to ensure the proper and timely implementation of the agreements and commitments concluded within the framework of the peace process, thus enabling the establishment of the desired peace in the Middle East - peace that ensures Israel's withdrawal from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the occupied Syrian Golan and the occupied Lebanese territories, and the exercise of the Palestinian people of their inalienable national rights, including their right to return, to self-determination and to establish their independent Palestinian State on their national soil with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The Palestinian people are still looking to the continued support of the international community to reach these objectives, and we all should join our efforts to further the just cause of peace.

E. Messages from specialized agencies of the United Nations system

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Mr. Federico Mayor, Director-General

[Original: English]

I take the opportunity of this celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to reiterate UNESCO's commitment to help the Palestinian Authority strengthen its institutions. UNESCO's priority programme in favour of the Palestinian people seeks to encourage activities in all its fields of competence, that it is to say education, science, culture and communication. While the Palestinian Authority received about US$ 400,000 from UNESCO's regular programme over the last year, UNESCO also succeeded in raising several million dollars in extrabudgetary funding in order to finance the 12 projects foreseen in its Programme of Action in favour of the Palestinian People (PAPP). This Programme is implemented in close cooperation with the United Nations system, the World Bank, the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and NGOs so as to avoid duplication. The establishment last year of a UNESCO Liaison Office in the Palestinian autonomous territories has played a major role in facilitating the implementation of PAPP activities in the field.

Drawing its inspiration from UNESCO's Constitution and in accordance with the instructions of the Organization's General Conference, UNESCO will pursue its peace-building efforts in the strong conviction that a just peace is the precondition for the effective exercise of the rights of the Palestinian people. A satisfactory solution to the Palestinian question is vital not only to the security and development of the region but to the cause of peace worldwide.

F. Messages from non-governmental organizations

Association des Etudes Internationales: Mr. Rachid Driss

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to congratulate and express my support to the United Nations for its continuing efforts aiming at helping the Palestinian people attain and exercise their inalienable rights, namely the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

While I find great satisfaction over the significant positive developments made by the peace process since September 1993 and the breakthrough in the stalemate following the conclusion of the Wye River Memorandum, I cannot lose sight of the continuing plight of the Palestinian people.

Therefore, I wish to reiterate my unflinching support to the Palestinian people in their fight for the liberation of their homeland and the achievement of their rightful cause.

Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue: Mr. Latif Dori, Chairman

[Original: Arabic]

We, the Israeli peace camp, would like to reaffirm our solidarity and unwavering support to the continuous struggle of the Palestinian people for achieving its noble goal, the end of Israeli occupation and the establishment of its independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, side by side with Israel.

Cyprus Solidarity Committee (EPAL): Mr. Donis Christofinis, General Secretary

[Original: English]

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People observed by the United Nations, EPAL (the collective solidarity committee comprising AKEL, the Labour Federation – PEO, the Peasant's Union – EKA, the Women's Movement – POGO, and the Youth Organization – EDON) reaffirms its support to the Palestinian people and demands without further delay the implementation of United Nations resolutions on their inalienable rights, including the right to establish their sovereign State on Palestinian soil parallel to Israel and the right of refugees to return.

We request Your Excellency to use your influence so that peace and justice may at the very earliest prevail in the region.

Federación Argentina para el Tercer Mundo: Mr. Jose Ferreyra

[Original: English]

FATEM joins in the celebration on the anniversary of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947.

Federación Palestina de Chile: Mr. Hernan R. Abusteme, Secretary-General, and Mr. José Elias A., President

[Original: Spanish]

I wish to convey to you my appreciation for the role played by your Committee in organizing this important international gathering, and the pleasure that it gives me to join you in an observance that the United Nations has dedicated to the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The peace process in the Middle East is going through a difficult and complex period because of Israel's disavowal of the principles on the basis of which that process began in Madrid, which call for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and of the land-for-peace formula, and because Israel has reneged on the undertakings and agreements entered into during the peace discussions sponsored and contributed to by the United States.

In the past year, the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation has increased because of Israeli policies and practices with regard to the expropriation of land, seizure of property, destruction of homes and building and expansion of settlements, in the city of Al-Quds in particular, together with continual blockades and arrests of Palestinians in flagrant violation of international law, international conventions and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Palestinian people will not submit to oppression and the continuation of the occupation. It is struggling courageously for the restoration of its legitimate national rights, foremost of which are the rights to self-determination and to establish an independent State and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes from which they were expelled, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Syrian Arab Republic will continue to defend the just cause of the Palestinian people, and is committed to striving for the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace based on full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the restoration of usurped rights.

From this international platform, we call upon the co-sponsors of the peace process and upon the international community to meet their responsibilities by compelling Israel to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy demanding the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and from southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa and guaranteeing the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. We also use this platform to call upon the international community to be mindful of the grave danger posed by the Israeli Government's persistence in adopting positions and policies inimical to peace and practices which violate the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations, and its refusal to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

We send appreciative and affectionate greetings to the Palestinian people inside and outside the occupied Palestinian territories, affirming our resolute support for it in its just and legitimate struggle.

We acclaim the efforts made by your distinguished Committee, which has been untiring in its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people. Together with the international community, we look forward to the day when the region can enjoy a just and comprehensive peace that will ensure security and stability for all peoples of the region.

Federación Palestina del Perú: Dr. César A. Salomón Herrada, Secretary-General

[Original: Spanish]

I have the honour to convey to you our fraternal greetings and our message of solidarity on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, celebrated each year on 29 November.

Now more than ever, thanks to the indefatigable endeavours of your Organization, the international community is focusing on the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights and on recent efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

We are approaching the most difficult stage of the peacekeeping process, which can be achieved only with the participation and involvement that we hope will be forthcoming from the international community.

Fifty years' work, which the international community fully recognizes and for which we express our appreciation, is now bearing fruit.

We wish to convey to you our fraternal greetings and our best wishes for success in your endeavours.

We also take this opportunity to send our regards to all those who have helped to further the Palestinian cause. May God bless you all.

Indo-Palestine Solidarity Organization: Mr. A. Sujanapal, General Secretary

[Original: English]

The Indo-Palestine Solidarity Organization (Kerala State Committee) reaffirms its solidarity with the people of Palestine for their fight for their inalienable rights. We are extending our best wishes in connection with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, observed by the United Nations on 29 November.

We are also extending our support for all the efforts taken by the United Nations for a diplomatic solution of the Palestine problem. On this historic occasion, we record our appreciation for the service rendered by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestine People to rally round the NGOs throughout the world to mobilize world opinion for the birthright of the people of Palestine. All these valuable efforts have played a vital role in the progress made thus far for peace in the land of Palestine.

We appreciate the historic role played by the great leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Hon. Yasser Arafat, for his untiring leadership of the fighting Palestinians.

The people of India have always stood for the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine. Our great leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi also declared their solidarity for the birthright of the Palestine people.

We fully welcome the peace accord signed recently in Washington, in the presence of President Bill Clinton.

We hope and wish that by May 1999, a new Palestine will emerge and the long-cherished dream of the Palestinians of returning to their homeland will become a reality.

Our best wishes on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amité entre les peuples:
Mr. Jean-Jacques Kirkyacharian, Former Chairman and Permanent Representative of MRAP to the United Nations at Geneva

[Original: French]

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is of particular importance this year, as we are about to witness decisive events.

After two years of equivocation, tricks and prevarication, the State of Israel and its Government have resumed negotiations. The part played by the international community and the pressure brought to bear by those in Israel who are in favour of peace were decisive in bringing about this breakthrough.

Nevertheless, the situation remains serious in view, in particular, of the continuation of and even increase in settlement activity. There are still those who think that the Palestinian territories should be reduced to pieces of confetti, thereby depriving the Palestinian people of the right to exist as a nation.

Such a concept is even more serious insofar as it undermines the peace camp in Palestine, encourages extremists on both sides and could eventually seal off forever the path to the just and lasting peace that is so desperately needed by all the peoples in the region.

MRAP has resolved to redouble its efforts to show solidarity with both the Palestinian people and the Israeli citizens who are working for peace.

Without a just solution, there will be no peace. Has this region not already suffered enough? The United Nations must increase its endeavours in order to enable justice and peace to triumph.

Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes: Mr. Yosvani Díaz Romero, President (Cuba), Mr. Romi Corbo González Cabrera, Executive Secretary (Uruguay), and Mr. Alejandro Urizar, Executive Secretary (Guatemala)

[Original: Spanish]

We greet you warmly on behalf of the Executive Secretariat of the Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes (Continental Organization of Latin American and Caribbean Students) (OCLAE).

As we know, the international community celebrates the anniversary of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November of each year. On this occasion, and because OCLAE is a non-governmental organization which represents 80 million students on the continent, we express our support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

We convey to you our declaration of solidarity on this important day.

Any future has to be better than the present!

Profesionales Pro Paz Israel-Palestina en México: Ms. Doris Musalem

[Original: Spanish]

This year, we celebrate once again the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and with its struggle to achieve at last the establishment of the Palestinian State.

The peace process which began in September 1993 had raised high hopes for peace in the Middle East, and the world truly believed that for the first time in 30 years, the Palestinians were gaining independence. But soon we realized that the Israeli Government was not willing to fulfil the commitments set forth in the Oslo Accords, which established a schedule for Israeli withdrawal from 100 per cent of the territories which, according to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), had been illegally occupied since 1967.

With the signing of the recent Wye Plantation agreement, Israel surrendered about 21 per cent of the West Bank, but it has consistently refused to withdraw from the remainder of that territory, alleging security considerations that are merely a pretext. In the meantime, it has continued to colonize Jerusalem at an accelerated rate and to extend its settlements in the remainder of the West Bank, in violation of United Nations resolutions. At the same time, the millions of refugees in the Palestinian diaspora continue to hope for a possible return to their age-old home. Through its many resolutions on the political and national rights of the Palestinian people, the United Nations has undertaken to legitimize the Palestinian cause, which has achieved virtually unanimous consensus at the international level.

Today, 51 years after the partition of Palestine by General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which mandated the creation of a Palestinian State in addition to the Jewish State, full international recognition of the Palestinian State can no longer be deferred. On the occasion of this Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the United Nations reaffirms its commitment to the national rights of that people, and it is urgent that it should continue to support and promote this commitment through a vigorous campaign

for the establishment of a sovereign, economically viable Palestinian State. The United Nations should also continue to encourage international diplomacy in an effort to ensure that the deadlines set for this peace process are met.

IV. CLOSING STATEMENTS

Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization

[Original: Arabic]

At the conclusion of this meeting convened to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it is my pleasure on behalf of Palestine, on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and on behalf of the Palestinian people to convey our profound thanks to the monarchs, heads of State or Government, Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers, heads of specialized agencies and all others who participated in this observance with messages of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

This international solidarity gives the Palestinian people confidence in the continued support of the States of the world for its right to establish an independent State of its own on its national soil. This solidarity strengthens our confidence in the capacity of the international community and the United Nations to help achieve the objective of enabling the oppressed and colonized peoples of the world to exercise their right to self-determination without foreign intervention.

There is no doubt that the statement of the Deputy Secretary-General, Her Excellency Ms. Louise Fréchette, was an expression of that solidarity. The observation that on this day 51 years ago the General Assembly adopted a resolution which, if implemented, would have created an Arab and a Jewish State in Palestine, living side by side, embodies a wise approach to this issue. The Deputy Secretary-General stressed the need to address not only the manifestations but also the causes of violence. She called for a future of peace, cooperation and good-neighbourliness, and rightly observed that the steady decline of the Palestinian economy in recent years was largely due to the impact of security measures in the occupied territories, the lack of free movement of persons and goods between the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinians' lack of control over their natural resources.

It is the insightful view of the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, that the United Nations has a central and indispensable role to play, because its resolutions constitute the frame of reference for any international effort to settle the question of Palestine.

I convey to you, Mr. Chairman, our profound gratitude for your continuous efforts. Once again we thank those who made statements or communicated messages in support of the Palestinian cause. I thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Security Council, the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and all others who participated in this meeting or who sent messages or otherwise expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

[Original: French]

We were all inspired, and filled with determination and hope, by the important statement Mr. Kaddoumi has just made.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank everyone who made this meeting possible, in particular representatives and other participants, as well as the members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and the Department of Public Information, and everyone who works behind the scenes, including those who provide for our security.

I also want to remind everyone that a Palestinian cultural exhibit presented by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine will be opened at 6 p.m. today in the public lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibit, entitled "Bethlehem 2000", is composed of a photographic exhibition and a display of artefacts. The opening of the exhibit will be followed by a reception to which all are cordially invited.